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# Return to Main Street : An Assessment of the Main Street Revitalization Program

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**Return to Main Street:  
An Assessment of the  
Main Street Revitalization Program**

**Thesis submitted to  
The Graduate College of  
Marshall University**

**In partial fulfillment of the  
Requirements for the degree of  
Master of Arts  
Humanities**

**by**

**Lisa Hechesky**

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Dr. Joyce East  
Dr. Robert Maslowski  
Dr. John Richards**

**Marshall University**

**May 2005**

## Abstract

### Return to Main Street: An Assessment of the Main Street Revitalization Program

By Lisa Hechesky

Once the heart of a town's commercial district, Main Street in the post-World War II era became a ghost town as suburbanization lured consumers and merchants to new shopping complexes in rural areas. From the 1950s to the 1970s, with the aid of federal dollars cities embarked on various urban renewal projects. These revitalization attempts did not help the slumping commercial districts. In many cases, they destroyed historic buildings and left the cleared city blocks empty for decades. The National Main Street Program, created and administered by the National Trust for Historic Preservation, began in 1980 to address problems faced by American Main Streets. Since its implementation, the National Main Street Program through its Four-Point Approach has helped communities restore and rehabilitate their downtowns. In West Virginia, several towns utilize this revitalization methodology. This study reviews the revitalization efforts in St. Albans, West Virginia, a Main Street community since 2001.

## Acknowledgements

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I would also like to thank the members of Washington Masonic Lodge Number 58, James Robinson, Ralph Robinson and Charles Filbin, for their memories of Main Street in St. Albans. Also, thanks to Neil Richardson of the St. Albans Historical Society for his assistance and documents. Finally, particular thanks goes to the St. Albans Renaissance Group for allowing me to join the Economic Restructuring Committee and their willingness to be a part of my thesis.

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## Chapter I:

### **Introduction**

At one time in America, a city's downtown was filled with the hustle and bustle of people shopping, working and living in this active urban setting. People from outlying areas "went to town" to shop at large department stores and smaller stores, many of which were locally owned. These shoppers flooded the streets as they walked from store to store or stopped by a window display just to "window shop." Not so long ago, people lined up outside a store's window to watch the newest home appliance, the television, on display because many people did not own their own set. Sadly as more and more Americans fled the cities for suburban life in the latter 20th century, these traditional urban retail areas became ghost towns as they lost most of their customer base. This left many cities without the heart of their town and no plan on how to restore it to its former glory.

This study will examine the efforts to restore the traditional downtown through the National Main Street Program. In particular the study will discuss the role of the traditional Main Street in communities, the effects of suburbanization on towns, the various programs formed to assist with urban decay, and finally the creation of the Main Street Program to aid cities with revitalizing their downtowns. A particular focus will be an evaluation of the Main Street Program and a case study of a West Virginia town attempting to redevelop its traditional Main Street district.

For many people the phrase "Main Street" conjures up images of the wholesome small town, an idealized piece of Americana, or the good old days. For many decades these concepts were more the norm than the exception. As towns grew, the Main Street

became the center of a community's activities. Whether large or small, a town's Main Street offered citizenry a place to conduct business, a social hub and a substantial tax base for the local government. Main Street had become such a beloved part of American life that by the 1950s, when Walt Disney planned his innovative California theme park, Disneyland, it took a central role. Disney wanted to recreate the Main Street of his childhood, that image of a wholesome small town bustling with people. The resulting Main Street, USA, area of Disneyland—and later Disney World—transported visitors back to a small turn-of-the-twentieth-century town. Although the Disney Main Street created a romanticized and not completely accurate depiction of Main Street, the ambiance and atmosphere did create the mood of an old Main Street; the effect Disney sought was masterfully crafted and carried out.<sup>1</sup>

As Disney's Main Street looked to recreate an ideal Main Street, real Main Streets began facing major changes during these same years. In the years after World War II, returning soldiers armed with the GI Bill began looking for a piece of the American Dream, namely home ownership. As the need for housing expanded beyond the urban areas of towns and cities, sprawling housing complexes sprang up in rural areas. Although the creation of suburbs started before World War II, these early housing complexes catered to the wealthy, who could afford large homes and the cost of commuting into the city. In the post-war era this changed. Places like Abraham Levitt's Levittown on New York's Long Island, with its mass produced, low-cost tract homes opened up the suburbs to the increasing middle-class. Furthermore, the growing use of the automobile allowed the housing complex to be located some distance from the major urban area, yet allowed residents an easy commute into the city. Also, soldiers educated

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<sup>1</sup> Christopher Finch, *The Art of Walt Disney*, (New York: Harry N. Abrams, Inc.), 1975, 148-50.

for white-collar occupations through the GI Bill sought suburban housing in order to achieve the middle-class lifestyle of a private home and yard for their families. Still others looked to escape the crime and overcrowding of city life.<sup>2</sup> Thus, Levittown became the model of suburban planning.

With this new housing outside of the city increasing, the need for businesses in these areas also increased. Once bustling Main Streets fell victim to the growing exodus to the suburbs. Because of America's love affair with the automobile, further stimulated by the creation of a national Interstate Highway System, people valued stores that catered to the new driving culture. These shifting living and driving patterns spelled doom for traditional Main Street. Businesses that once relied on townspeople and foot traffic found it necessary to follow to the suburbs or go out of business.

Businesses following residents out to the suburbs was nothing new. Prior to the Great Depression, businesses, responding to the newly popular automobile, began to locate along major highways creating early strip developments. As the post World War II suburbs boomed, however, modern shopping centers began to challenge the strip mall developments as the destination of choice for consumers. Between the 1960s and 1980s, large shopping complexes gobbled up land especially on the outskirts of towns. These mammoth centers attracted shoppers away from the traditional retail areas by offering large chain stores and one-stop shopping conveniences, enclosed shopping areas protecting customers from the elements, and finally mega discount stores offering much

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<sup>2</sup> Maryland Department of Transportation, "Suburbanization Historic Context and Survey," [website] Hanover, Md.: Maryland Department of Transportation State Highway Administration, 2000, [available at [www.sha.state.md.us/keepingcurrent/maintainRoadsBridges/bridges/oppe/suburbs/B-1.pdf](http://www.sha.state.md.us/keepingcurrent/maintainRoadsBridges/bridges/oppe/suburbs/B-1.pdf) accessed on: 12 August 2004.]; Steve Schoenherr, Evolution of the Shopping Center, [website] University of San Diego, 2003, [available at <http://history.sandiego.edu/gen/soc/shoppingcenter.html> accessed on: 12, August 2004.]



lower prices than small independent shops. All of these gave suburbanites little reason to travel downtown and shop along Main Street.<sup>3</sup>

As a result of changes in living, working and shopping patterns, Main Streets across the nation were lined with vacant stores. Shop owners who were still competitive moved to the new retail complexes, while others simply went out of business and the buildings along Main Street stood empty. The departure of businesses from Main Street left towns filled with sparsely occupied older buildings. As the consumers shunned Main Street, it became less likely that new businesses would move in. Older urban areas and unique ethnic enclaves deteriorated while outlying areas became homogenized with chain stores and fast food franchises. These new commercial malls in one town looked like a thousand others; towns lost their unique local flavor. Moreover, municipalities lost tax revenue because most of the malls built were outside of the city limits. As the suburbs expanded and Main Street contracted, another problem arose. Urban sprawl crept through the countryside obliterating green space and farmland for more housing and shopping complexes.

Seeing these traditional commercial areas continue to decline, many communities undertook various revitalization programs with limited success. Urban renewal became the new mantra in towns and cities facing a deteriorating downtown. However, many of these urban renewal projects did more to exacerbate the problem than help. Boston, for example, lost nearly one-third of the old city, which included some of the city's most

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<sup>3</sup> "A Brief History of Shopping Centers," [website] New York, NY: International Council of Shopping Centers, 2000, [available at: [www.icsc.org/srch/about/impactofshoppingcenters/briefhistory.html](http://www.icsc.org/srch/about/impactofshoppingcenters/briefhistory.html) accessed on: 15, August 2004.]

historic places, to highway and high-rise developments.<sup>4</sup> Most of these urban renewal programs allowed many of a town's oldest buildings to be torn down; far too often the grand old buildings were replaced by vacant lots and no new development. Nothing seemed to be helping Main Streets, yet the need for revitalization was glaring. Concerned primarily by the loss of historic buildings, yet sympathetic to the economic plight of these small towns, the National Trust for Historic Preservation stepped in by creating the National Main Street Program in 1980. Since this program's inception, cities of varying sizes with varying degrees of problems have joined with the National Trust to revitalize their sagging commercial districts.

After years of failed urban renewal projects, community and city leaders alarmed by the loss of prosperity on Main Street looked for assistance, but were unsure it could come from the National Trust. Prior to that time, the National Trust had largely ignored city revitalization programs. Its main focus was to encourage preservation by providing expertise and resources to public and private groups on the state and local level. However, in 1977 the National Trust created a pilot program in three small Midwestern cities to attempt revitalization of Main Street.<sup>5</sup> What happened in those cities was phenomenal and proved that Main Street businesses could compete in the era of suburbanization and big box retailers.

In three short years, 1977-80, the three pilot towns reported outstanding statistics in their growth of business occupancy and increased sales tax revenue. Furthermore, for

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<sup>4</sup> Fast Facts, "Urban Renewal," [website] nd., [available at: [http://www.fact-index.com/u/ur/urban\\_renewal.html](http://www.fact-index.com/u/ur/urban_renewal.html) accessed on: 2 June 2004.]

<sup>5</sup> Norman Tyler, *Historic Preservation: An Introduction to Its History, Principles, and Practice*, (New York: W. W. Norton and Co., 2000), 178-79.

every dollar spent to manage the Main Street program, \$11 were spent by the private sector for building rehabilitation or adaptive use projects.<sup>6</sup> With this success, the National Trust saw that Main Street's future looked healthy if handled correctly. Thus, the pilot program expanded nationally in 1980. The national program has continued the success of the early pilot program. According to the National Main Street Center, from 1980 to 2002 over 1700 communities participated in the Main Street Program. In these years, the program has generated \$17 billion in private and public reinvestment projects in older buildings with an average reinvestment of \$9,513,151 to each community. The program has rehabilitated 93,734 buildings through public and private partnerships. Finally, the ratio of dollars generated in the community to dollars spent by local Main Street Programs is a little over \$40 for every one.<sup>7</sup> Reviving businesses on Main Street has also returned jobs to towns. In many cases, new entrepreneurs have set up niche businesses making Main Street a unique destination site unlike the chain stores found in the malls.

In addition to its focus on economic development, a large part of the Main Street Approach is to preserve historic and architecturally significant buildings and districts. Historically, as Main Streets grew, expanded, and prospered in the age before chain stores and franchises, the buildings along the street varied in architectural styles reflecting the preferences of the time. Main Streets across the nation are a blend of styles that show various cultural influences on towns. For example, a town may have had a

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<sup>6</sup> Mary Anne Thomas, "*The Economic Impact of Georgia's Main Street Program: A Public/Private Success Story*," Presentation given at the Celebrating Rural Georgia Conference, 1998. [available at [www.georgiatruster.org/whatwedo/mainstreet\\_success.html](http://www.georgiatruster.org/whatwedo/mainstreet_success.html) accessed on 18 August 2004.]

<sup>7</sup> National Main Street Center, "Economic Statistics: Historic Preservation Equals Economic Development: The Main Street Program's Success," [website] Washington, DC.: National Trust for Historic Preservation, 2004, [available at: <http://www.mainstreet.org/content.aspx?page=215&section=3> accessed on: 14 August 2004.]

beautiful Art Deco theatre next to a grand Neo-classical hotel. These juxtapositions of architectural styles demonstrate the cultural history of the town, and by preserving these buildings the town saves its identity. Moreover, these buildings often are fine examples of particular styles and offer visitors an opportunity to experience something that large “box” retailers and “cookie-cutter” fast food restaurants cannot offer.

To bring shoppers and visitors back to Main Street, communities employ a four-step program called the Main Street Approach.<sup>8</sup> The essential economic development component focuses on finding those niche businesses that make Main Street a place where shoppers want to be. Design Control reflects the National Trust’s traditional concern for historic buildings. Because the buildings that make Main Street unique must be protected, various types of design control provide the method to maintain and preserve the traditional look of the street. In addition, the program works to achieve cooperative marketing among the Main Street merchants, and it emphasizes innovative program events that bring people back to Main Street.

Towns participating in the program across the nation have found success recasting their Main Streets through this method. By definition these towns are among the smaller municipalities in the country, normally a population under 50,000. For them, it is vital to return business to their Main Streets for continuing prosperity. A healthy and preserved Main Street is the key for small towns to create a bustling and vital community. Main Streets mean more to a community than an internal business district; Main Streets are symbols of a town’s heritage, pride, and vitality.

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<sup>8</sup> National Main Street Center, “About the Main Street Program,” [website] Washington, DC: National Main Street Center, 2004, [available at <http://www.mainstreet.org/About/msapproach.htm> accessed on: 14 August 2004.]

St. Albans, West Virginia, is attempting to use the Main Street approach to revitalize a once prosperous downtown. Revitalization of Main Street for St. Albans includes a focus on cultural heritage tourism. The town, located in Kanawha County, is designated as a class II West Virginia city with a population near 12,000.<sup>9</sup> In its early history, the town was called Coalsmouth. In 1872, the name changed to St. Albans. The town boomed during years when timber was a large industry in the state. Logs floated down the Coal River to be processed at the many saw mills in the town, and with the addition of railroad service, St. Albans became a vibrant town with many businesses. The Main Street was located near the Coal River and along the old James River and Kanawha Turnpike, later U. S. Route 60. People from many places visited, shopped, and congregated on Main Street during those years. Like many other towns, St. Albans' main industry died out. Because of its close proximity to the larger city of Charleston and the growth of the chemical industry across the Kanawha River during the mid twentieth century, residents of St. Albans found jobs elsewhere, and the town became a bedroom community. Main Street continued to function as the town's business district until the 1970s, when two shopping centers and an indoor shopping mall opened in the town. These retail ventures negatively affected Main Street businesses.

An effort to boost the traditional Main Street district, now called Olde Main, began in the early 1980s; however, the early success was short lived. Businesses began relocating or shutting down within a few years of the opening of the renewed Main Street district. By the 1990s Olde Main was a desolate area with few businesses and several nightclubs. In 1999, a group of citizens started the St. Albans Renaissance Group

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<sup>9</sup> Darrell E. Holmes, ed. *West Virginia Blue Book 2002*, (Charleston, WV.: Karl C. Lilly and Associates), 2002, 798-99.

(SARG) to help revive the town as a whole and to apply the Main Street approach to Olde Main. SARG has been a member of the state's Main Street program since 2001.<sup>10</sup> Olde Main was added to the National Register of Historic Places as a historic district in 2000. Before the designation, one building in the district, the Bank of St. Albans building, had been on the National Register since 1988. SARG is currently in the process of restoring businesses to Olde Main. The Economic Restructuring Committee's function is to examine and plan ways to bring and maintain businesses on Main Street. The group seeks for Olde Main to become both a commercial success and a tourist destination. It is particularly looking at heritage tourism tied to the Coal River as a possibility for the district, since the river was important to the development of the town.

Equipped with a plan for heritage tourism and a historic business district, SARG is in the beginning process of revitalization. The question for the group is: can they successfully adapt the principles of the Main Street program to revitalize its Olde Main Historic District? This is the central question examined by this thesis. The study will use a case study methodology to establish the characteristics of a model Main Street program and then compare the St. Albans approach to the model and analyze the differences that appear. Following this introduction, chapter two will examine the impact of urban renewal and its effect in creating a new revitalization program that focused on preservation rather than destruction. Then it will discuss the Main Street program and the mechanisms by which successful Main Street programs function. Chapter three will turn to urban renewal and the Main Street programs in West Virginia as well as to the history of St. Albans and recount its development over the decades. It will examine the activity

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<sup>10</sup> Rosemary Clendenin, "Main Street in St. Albans Has a Rich Heritage," St. Albans Monthly, August 2004, 32.

that took place in the Main Street district during its most successful era and examine the history of significant buildings in order to provide a context for the current efforts to revitalize the district. Chapter four will describe the St. Albans Renaissance Group, their goals, organization, and activities as they attempt to carry out the Main Street program. Particular attention will be paid to the planning process and feasibility studies being attempted by SARG. The chapter also will provide the comparative analysis between the model national program and the St. Albans program. Finally, chapter five will draw the study to a conclusion by reviewing the problem and major findings.

## Chapter II:

### **Reinventing America's downtowns**

#### **Introduction**

By the latter decades of the 20th Century, America's Main Streets were at a crossroad. Within a few years Main Streets had declined as the center of commercial activity to a forgotten part of town. As people increasingly left urban areas for the family friendly suburbs with their more convenient malls, Main Street seemed destined to wither and die. Towns filled with aging, empty buildings as local business owners preferred modern buildings near the new commercial and residential hubs. Large chain retailers attracted consumers with a huge variety of goods and cheap prices, but lacked a connection to the community. If Main Streets were to survive in this new era, overcoming these problems was vital. Moreover, community members and business owners would have to see that Main Street was still relevant to their towns and that its continued viability was essential to the town's growth and prosperity.

Americans began to address the problems caused by suburbanization and general urban decline soon after the post-war America exodus began. By the 1950s, the urban renewal initiative had gained a widespread following across the country. Urban renewal, in its many forms, sought to fix the steady decline of cities through a variety of plans. However, many of the projects undertaken during this era also served to create new problems. Large cities and small towns bulldozed old buildings, relocated citizens, and promised a revitalized downtown in the name of urban renewal. Instead, urban centers often received poorly planned projects, a total destruction of older buildings with their unique architecture, and vast empty lots without development. Community members



soon saw what urban renewal was really doing to their towns. Once people realized that the old buildings being torn down offered more than large box retail stores and cookie-cutter fast food restaurants, they set out to save their Main Streets. From this need the national Main Street program developed. This program set out to reverse the degeneration of downtowns by celebrating architectural diversity, history, and economic benefits.

### **Urban Renewal**

For many towns, post war suburbanization only exacerbated other urban problems. Larger cities had issues related to decaying buildings, slums, poverty, and overcrowding before the war; with the departure of residents and businesses to the suburbs, these problems were compounded creating a dire need for urban revitalization. Smaller towns were not so affected by the same problems big cities had; instead, they often faced losing population to the larger metropolitan areas. Moreover, most small towns were self-contained with “mom and pop” businesses and some franchised stores in their commercial districts. Once suburbanization snatched residents and businesses from towns, these smaller municipalities began facing problems similar to their larger brethren. Seeking solutions to these problems, cities began various development initiatives known as urban renewal.

The promise of urban renewal began with the real need to assist cities in cleaning up and revitalizing their downtowns in the era of suburbanization. From large cities to small towns, politicians joined in the movement to recreate, revitalize, and renew their downtowns. No matter the size, whether several large city blocks or one small Main

Street, municipalities—with the help of federal and private funds—embarked on the first wave of revitalization.

The roots of urban renewal date to the 1937 Housing Act. This federal act created the U.S. Housing Authority for the purpose of eliminating slums and increasing the amount of safe, good housing. This act mandated that for every one substandard unit cleared, one new housing unit would replace it.<sup>1</sup> The goal was to raise the quality of housing without displacing or out pricing low income residents. Several years later Congress passed and President Harry Truman signed the Housing Act of 1949. Under Title I of the act, cities used federal funds to clear slums and urban blight and to establish central business district redevelopment projects.<sup>2</sup>

The 1949 Housing Act gave cities more leeway in the scope of projects. Title I allowed municipalities to designate areas of the city as “blighted” or “slums” and authorized Urban Renewal Authorities to clear the blighted land for new development. To secure the federal funds, cities established agencies often called Urban Renewal or Redevelopment Authorities to design plans and recommend sites for redevelopment.<sup>3</sup> The Authority then sold or leased the land to private developers or public agencies. According to Massachusetts Institute of Technology professor of urban studies and history, Robert Fogelson, “The federal grants could cover up to two-thirds of the net

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<sup>1</sup> Robert M. Fogelson, *Downtown: Its rise and fall, 1880-1950*, (New Haven, CT: Yale UP), 2001, 340; “The past: United States Housing Act of 1937,” Austin, TX: Texas Low Income Housing Information Services, nd. [available at <http://www.texashousing.org/txlihis/txlihis/contact.html> accessed on 15 April 2005].

<sup>2</sup> Yvonne Scruggs, “HUD’s Stewardship of National Urban Policy: A Retrospective View,” *Cityscape: A Journal of Policy Development and Research* 1 no. 3 (1995): 34.

<sup>3</sup> Fogelson, 366-67.

project cost; the redevelopment agency would have to come with the one-third.”<sup>4</sup>

Because of this lower cost to the developer, cities shifted focus from clearing substandard housing and building new better housing to clearing out areas of downtown for new uses.<sup>5</sup>

In 1950 Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, became the first city to undertake a true urban renewal program. Pittsburgh was big city with big problems. A city built on the manufacturing of steel, it was filled with smoke and dirt from the mills. City officials believe that if they cleared away the blight of the old, dirty neighborhoods, Pittsburgh would see a renaissance. Downtown Pittsburgh sits at the confluence of the Monongahela and Allegheny Rivers. The district, known as the Golden Triangle, underwent a transformation during Pittsburgh’s first Renaissance. Thirty-six acres of downtown land, at the Triangle’s point where the Monongahela and Allegheny form the Ohio River, became Point State Park. The park featured a large fountain and included native flora from the area and created open space in the compact downtown area. New corporate buildings for Pittsburgh Plate Glass, Jones and Laughlin Steel, National Supply and Westinghouse Electric created a dramatic skyline for the city.<sup>6</sup>

With the success of the downtown renaissance, the city’s Urban Renewal Authority continued its revitalization plans. The East Liberty neighborhood became the next area to renew. The project closed off the center of the neighborhood to automobile

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<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 376.

<sup>5</sup> Mindy Thompson Fullilove, *Root Shock: How Tearing Up City Neighborhoods Hurts America, and What We Can Do About It*, (New York: Ballantine Books), 2004, 57-59.

<sup>6</sup> “The Point: Mayor Lawrence on Urban Design,” Carnegie Library of Pittsburgh. [address by Mayor David Lawrence 1956. available at: [http://www.clpgh.org/exhibit/neighborhoods/point/point\\_n102.html](http://www.clpgh.org/exhibit/neighborhoods/point/point_n102.html) accessed on: 15 April 2005.]

traffic and built a one-way loop around the business district, razed 1,200 homes and reduced the size of the commercial district by 1 million square feet.<sup>7</sup> Years later, this project is widely seen as a disaster because development declined rather than increased.<sup>8</sup>

For Pittsburgh's redevelopment projects, urban renewal bought the successful Golden Triangle district, but other ineffective projects also filled the city. Lower Hill, a working-class, minority and ethnic neighborhood, was the site of a planned cultural district. After an intended symphony hall relocated to a downtown site, however, the cultural district never materialized and 9.2 acres of a once active, bustling neighborhood became a parking lot.<sup>9</sup>

What happened in Pittsburgh began to occur in other cities that tried urban renewal. Boston undertook a renewal plan in 1958 to revitalize the slums of the city's West End. Again, a neighborhood filled with poor, working-class, minority and immigrant residents, who had little power to stop the demolition, was the target. Luxury high-rise apartments and government buildings replaced their homes and businesses. The area lost its identity and the city stopped recognizing the West End as a separate neighborhood; instead it has become a part of Beacon Hill. What happened to Boston's West End has become a prime example of a misguided urban renewal project.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Dan Fitzpatrick, "The Story of Urban Renewal," [on-line news article] *Pittsburg Post-Gazette*, May 21, 2001. [available online at: <http://www.post-gazette.com/businessnews/20000521eastliberty1.asp>, accessed on: 13, September 2004], 1-2.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 12.

<sup>10</sup> Vivienne Belmont, "Boston: City in Transition," [website] Boston, Mass.; Emerson College, 2004. [available at: [http://journalism.emerson.edu/changingboston/west\\_end/](http://journalism.emerson.edu/changingboston/west_end/) accessed on: 20, September 2004], 1.

Into the 1960s, urban renewal was the foremost plan for revitalizing all areas of a city. Another Housing Act, passed in 1954, required municipalities to submit community development plans in order to receive federal renewal monies. Purdue University professor of history, Jon C. Teaforde noted, “[T]he 1954, 1959, and 1961 housing acts permitted an ever-increasing amount of urban renewal money to be spent for commercial projects and facilitated the urban renewal mechanism to expand colleges, universities, and hospital in the central city.”<sup>11</sup>

This new Housing Act, coupled with the National Interstate Highways program, which began in 1956, reshaped the cityscape for decades.<sup>12</sup> Although many community members and activists bemoaned the effects of urban renewal on the citizens and buildings, cities continued the practice. By the 1960s, however, critics began to lash out that urban renewal was far from a true revitalization effort. Instead, they believed it became a wholesale method for wiping out neighborhoods labeled as undesirable and segregating races and classes. Many of the neighborhoods wiped out, as in Pittsburgh and Boston, were populated by immigrants and minorities who lacked the political clout to oppose the project. In most cases the displaced citizens moved to other ethnic or racially segregated areas of the city causing Pittsburgh to be one of the most segregated large American cities by 1960.<sup>13</sup> Title II of the 1949 Housing Act also created more segregation problems in cities. Under this section of the act, the federal government

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<sup>11</sup> Jon Teaforde, “Urban Renewal and its Aftermath,” *Housing Policy Debate* 11 no.2 (2000): 445.

<sup>12</sup> “Urban Renewal,” [website] St. Petersburg, Fla.,: Wikimedia Foundation . 2005, [available at: [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Urban\\_renewal](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Urban_renewal) accessed on: 13, September 2004], 3.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*

guaranteed mortgage loans for new single-family dwellings. However, only certain areas of a city qualified for the guaranteed loans. It also blocked minority home ownership.<sup>14</sup>

When President Lyndon B. Johnson set out his “Great Society” plan to fight poverty, urban redevelopment became an important component. The vision of the Great Society created the cabinet level Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) in 1965.<sup>15</sup> During that year, President Johnson established two task forces to examine and make recommendations on the state of America’s cities. From these panels the Demonstration Cities program emerged. The program was another attempt to reinvent the urban landscape. Congress passed the Demonstration Cities and Metropolitan Development Act to address urban issues pointed out from the earlier task forces. President Johnson signed the bill in November 1966. The original Demonstration Cities name changed to Model Cities because the word demonstration was closely associated with urban riots from earlier that year.<sup>16</sup>

Also in the mid-1960s, the National Trust for Historic Preservation was studying the effects that urban renewal, Interstate construction and other public projects were having on the built environment. In their report, *With Heritage So Rich*, the National Trust found those projects caused much loss of America’s great architecture. From the report’s recommendations, Congress passed the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966. This landmark piece of legislation created the National Register of Historic Places,

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<sup>14</sup> “A Brief History of Federal Housing Policy,” Raleigh, NC.; North Carolina Housing Coalition, nd, [available at: <http://www.nclihc.org/issues/history.shtml> accessed on: 15 April 2005],1

<sup>15</sup> “HUD’s History,” Washington, D.C.; U. S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, 2005, [available at: <http://www.hud.gov/library/bookshelf18/hudhistory.cfm> accessed 18 February 2005],1.

<sup>16</sup> John A. Andrew III, *Lyndon Johnson and the Great Society*, (Chicago: Ivan Dee, Inc.), 1998, 136-44.

an Advisory Council on Historic Preservation to oversee Section 106 evaluations, and State Historic Preservation Offices. Additionally, it supported local preservationists to establish historic districts. The act's most significant impact on historic properties was the Section 106 review. Under the Section 106, any project that utilizes federal funding must be reviewed to gauge the effect the project will have on the property. Although the Section 106 review does not halt the destruction of historic properties, it has reduced massive obliteration of cities since the goal is to avoid or mitigate the adverse effect on the historic property.<sup>17</sup>

Urban renewal programs continued into the 1970s. However, presidential support for urban projects vacillated in the Nixon Administration. In 1971, President Nixon proposed a new Department of Community Development to incorporate HUD, the Community Action Program and other urban projects conducted by the Departments of Transportation and Commerce, but the department never established. Then, in 1973, Nixon placed a freeze on all federal funding for housing and community development projects. The next year, 1974, under President Gerald Ford, funding returned. In restoring funding for urban renewal projects Congress merged funding for urban renewal, Model Cities and other federal urban projects into the Community Development Block Grant Act.<sup>18</sup> This federal grant program allowed municipalities to rehabilitate housing, make public improvements, conduct historic preservation activities, build green spaces, and spur economic development.<sup>19</sup> The Community Development Block Grants gave

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<sup>17</sup> Norm Tyler, *Historic Preservation: An Introduction to Its History, Principles, and Practice*. (New York: W. W. Norton and Co.), 2000, 44-50.

<sup>18</sup> Scruggs, 40.

<sup>19</sup> Alexander Garvin, *The American City: What Works, What Doesn't*, (New York: McGraw-Hill), 1996, 221.

cities and states more control in designing what projects to spend the funds on.<sup>20</sup>

President Carter's administration brought a renewed commitment to urban revitalization.

In 1978, the National Urban Policy poured money into more urban renewal projects.<sup>21</sup>

During the peak urban renewal decades, a very popular project was the pedestrian mall. Such a mall prohibited automobile traffic by closing the street and rerouting traffic. The concept borrows from the European outdoor shopping tradition. Kalamazoo, Michigan, opened the first American pedestrian mall in 1958. Early on, the mall rejuvenated the city's downtown. The early success led to a mixed-use convention and hotel complex building next to the mall in 1975. According planning consultant, Greg Flisram, "The initial fanfare caused by the Kalamazoo Mall spawned a flurry of copycat pedestrian mall construction throughout the U.S."<sup>22</sup> However, after the departure of the northern anchor, a community college, activity in the mall declined sharply. Like the Kalamazoo Mall, many of the other pedestrian malls met similar fates. Flisram notes, "By the end of the 1980s, however, it seemed that the Mall, as in most other cities, had become an anachronism; a tired piece of urban design fashion whose novelty had long worn thin."<sup>23</sup>

Joining the many communities across the nation in undertaking pedestrian mall projects during late 1970s were several West Virginia cities. Huntington, St. Albans, and Dunbar were just three of the towns that created pedestrian shopping plazas from their

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<sup>20</sup> Scruggs, 40; Neil S. Mayer, "HUD's First 30 Years: Big Steps Down A Longer Road," *Cityscape: A Journal of Policy Development and Research* 1 no. 3 (1995): 5.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, 55.

<sup>22</sup> Greg Flisram, "Post Modern or Post-Mortem? The Kalamzoo Mall Revisited." American Planning Association. March 2000. [available at: <http://www.planning.org/viewpoints/kalamazoo.htm> accessed on: 7 April 2005], 1.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*



older commercial districts. These new outdoor shopping center followed the typical pedestrian mall design. The versions in Huntington, St. Albans and Dunbar closed off the street to automobile traffic and rerouted the traditional traffic flow. Huntington also cleared a city block to make way for development. Unfortunately, the “Superblock,” as it was dubbed by the media, sat empty until ground was broken on the Pullman Square development in 2002. All of these attempts to bring life back to urban areas still lacked real results. Meanwhile, suburban growth continued as subdivisions, strip malls, and shopping centers blossomed throughout the rural areas.

Since the 1960s, preservationists had criticized the devastating loss of unique architecture and buildings in the name of urban renewal. These grand old buildings that met with wrecking balls and bulldozers had given neighborhoods identity and provided a valuable window into the culture of the area. Preservationists were shocked into action when, in 1963, New York City lost one of its most notable buildings—Pennsylvania Station. The grand facility spanned two city-blocks and evoked memories of the glory days of the railroad. However, it was not important in the modern era or so the Pennsylvania Railroad thought. After the loss of Penn Station, New York City established the New York City Landmarks Preservation Commission.<sup>24</sup>

Buildings like Penn Station, with their grand architectural styles provided atmosphere and ambiance to many cities. In the haste to revitalize, however, many of these significant and less grand buildings suffered the same fate as Penn Station. Then sterile, unadorned, steel and glass Modern structures replaced them. The new buildings

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<sup>24</sup> Tony Hiss, *The Experience of Place: A New Way of Looking at and Dealing with Our Radically Changing Cities and Countryside*, (New York: Vintage Books, 1990), 62-63.

borrowed the mantra of the Modernist “less is more” and provided cities with nothing in the way of uniqueness or originality.<sup>25</sup>

Many cities erected high-rise residential complexes, which in many instances were low-income housing developments. Similarly in commercial areas, high skyscrapers filled with offices replaced the traditional commercial buildings. Additionally, shopping areas still focused on creating pedestrian friendly malls around office towers or in the suburbs, but rarely near the low income housing projects. Traditional areas of commerce, like Main Street, benefited little from any of the revitalization projects. Some towns razed entire Main Streets to make way for modern high-rises; others cut off Main Street from traffic through ill-conceived pedestrian plazas. It was clear by the mid 1970s that for all of the promise of urban renewal, it had done little to bring people back to downtown. To breathe life back into Main Street, community leaders searched for a new solution.

### **Main Street Program**

This new outlook started with a few Midwestern communities. Leaders from various cities brought the issue of dying Main Streets to the attention of the National Trust for Historic Preservation. The National Trust had been created in 1949 to assist with saving historic properties, and in 1966 the National Register of Historic Places was created to highlight and acknowledge historic properties in the country.<sup>26</sup> Before the issue of preserving Main Street came to the National Trust, it had no emphasis on saving these commercial areas. However as concerns about urban renewal deepened, the

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<sup>25</sup> James Howard Kunster, *The Geography of Nowhere: The Rise and Decline of America's Man-made Landscape*, (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1993), 80.

<sup>26</sup> Tyler, 58.

National Trust embarked on a new method to aid ailing urban areas by establishing a pilot program in 1977.<sup>27</sup> Unlike the sweeping plans of urban renewal, the Main Street process would focus on existing buildings and how to revive them into bustling commercial districts again.

The program began as a three-year demonstration program in Galesburg, Illinois; Hot Springs, South Dakota; Madison, Indiana. The rationale behind the three-year pilot program was the preservation and rehabilitation of older buildings to revive commercial districts. To achieve success, however, the program also sought to determine the reasons Main Streets were in decline.<sup>28</sup> The National Trust supported the program by analyzing the needs of each downtown and determining its assets. Once the towns were analyzed architecturally and economically, the National Trust placed full-time directors in each town to facilitate the program. Directors served to energize the community to return as customers on Main Street. Each director was to advocate for Main Street to both the merchants and community members.<sup>29</sup> After the initial program was complete, the results were astounding. The Main Street program found success where other urban revitalization programs had not.

The most remarkable measure of the program's success was economic: for every dollar spent to manage the program, \$11 were returned through private money in rehabilitation of buildings. Other significant changes created by the program included an increase in the number of businesses on the Main Streets. Hot Springs showed a gain of

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<sup>27</sup> "History of the National Main Street Center," [website]. Washington, DC: National Trust for Historic Preservation, 2004. [available at <http://www.mainstreet.org/content.aspx?page=1807&section=1> accessed on: 28 February, 2005.] 1

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*

seven businesses; Madison also grew by seven, and Galesburg's Main Street businesses increased by thirty. Moreover, the proliferation of businesses and consumers along Main Street resulted in a 25 percent increase in sales tax revenue for Hot Springs and 95 percent business occupancy in Galesburg.<sup>30</sup>

With results that proved Main Street could be a vital economic area, the National Trust expanded the program to more towns. In 1980 members of the National Trust's Midwest Regional Office and the directors of the three pilot towns became the staff for the National Main Street Center. The program extended into six states and each state selected five towns as designated Main Street communities.<sup>31</sup> Within a decade, 1980-1990, the program had expanded to include 31 state Main Street Programs. As of 2003, the number of states participating in the Main Street Program is 41.<sup>32</sup>

The lessons learned from the demonstration towns became the foundation for the Main Street Four-Point Approach, a comprehensive plan to guide the process of revitalization. Together these four areas of emphasis—organization, promotion, design and economic restructuring—create a tried and successful model for towns seeking a renewed commercial district. In the Main Street Approach, there are also eight principles of success: comprehensive, incremental, self-help, partnerships, identifying and capitalizing on existing assets, quality, change, and implementation.<sup>33</sup> The National

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<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>33</sup> National Main Street Center, "The Main Street Philosophy: Eight Principles of Success," [website] Washington, DC: National Main Street Center, 2004. [available at <http://www.mainstreet.org/content.aspx?page=2358&section=2> accessed on: 20 January 2005.], 1

Main Street Center describes the principles as essential components with the Four-Point Approach to produce success for the local Main Street program.<sup>34</sup>

The center of the Main Street philosophy is that revitalization is a comprehensive, long-term investment for the community that requires many facets to achieve success. When attempting to return Main Street to its once prosperous status, communities must look beyond getting merchants into empty buildings. Without all of the pieces of the Main Street Approach working together, a renewed Main Street will never emerge.

The first step toward revitalization in the Four-Point Approach is building the Main Street organization. This is the basis for all work in the Main Street program. Without a cohesive group to facilitate committees and manage volunteers the remaining steps of the program cannot proceed. Organization also includes the establishment of a governing board and hiring a director and other staff members.<sup>35</sup>

Once the organization is established, the program director works to bring together community members, civic organizations, business owners, property owners, and city officials to maintain the financial base and to serve on the four committees—economic restructuring, design, promotion, and organization. The whole process of the Main Street Approach is intended to be a self-help (one of the eight principles) method. While the National Main Street Center and state Main Street Programs provide local organizations with technical assistance, networking and training, the heart of the program lies within the community.

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<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, 1; National Main Street Center, “The Four Points.” Washington, DC: National Main Street Center, 2004. [available at: <http://www.mainstreet.org/content.aspx?page=47&section=2>, accessed on: 20 January 2005.], 1.

<sup>35</sup> “The Four Points,” 1; Colorado Community Revitalization Association, “The Main Street Four Point Approach” [pdf document], [available at <http://www.ccraonline.org/pdfs/MainStreet%20FourPoint%20Approach.pdf> accessed on: 7 April 2005.], 1.

After forming the organizational foundation for the local Main Street program, the other three points of the approach become a guiding source for sustained revitalization effort. Promotion of Main Street becomes important as the program attempts to bring in new businesses, investors, shoppers and the community. The promotion element allows all of the businesses on Main Street to coordinate sales and events and have them advertised together so that more people will frequent the district. Promoting the new and exciting plans for Main Street is essential so that potential customers will be aware of new merchants and services offered. Without the customers, the businesses will not have a sustainable customer base to stay in business. Thus, coordinated promotion is essential to the economic recovery desired.<sup>36</sup>

The Design component works on many levels. Part of it means actual improvements to the buildings on Main Street. This is where façade improvements and rehabilitation or adaptive use projects make the old stores attractive once again to new or continuing businesses. Normally design guidelines and regulations ensure that historic building elements are not lost in any rehabilitation projects. Another part of the Design aspect is to deal with the urban design of Main Street as a whole. Through streetscape projects, elements such as new streetlights and sidewalks enhance the overall district. In many instances, these projects add green space and address parking and traffic issues. The overall role of Design is to make Main Street attractive to new businesses while keeping its historic context.<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*

The most difficult yet vital piece of re-energizing Main Street requires the Main Street organization to work toward developing a strong and diverse commercial district. Finding the right mix of businesses that can succeed on Main Street is a long term process. Through Economic Restructuring, the Main Street organization secures financial resources for revitalization projects, recruits retailers and non-retail businesses, and works to retain current businesses through the revitalization process.<sup>38</sup>

After 25 years, the Main Street Approach has proven to be a viable method of reclaiming traditional business districts for many towns. Communities have found success following the Four-Point Approach as laid out by the National Main Street Center supplemented by the eight principles. Nevertheless, each town looking to give its Main Street a resurrection will face unique obstacles that will, in turn, lead to the ultimate success or failure of the venture. There are, however, common elements that many successful Main Street Programs share.

### **Model Program**

Each community approaches Main Street revitalization through the Four Points and Eight Principles. This provides a solid base for all programs. However, to successfully revitalize Main Street, many programs utilize other elements to assist in their efforts. By evaluating ten successful Main Street Program participants, a model program has been established for this study. These ten programs form the basis for the model program and its characteristics. These ten cities were: Burlington, Iowa; Greenville, South Carolina; Jaffrey, New Hampshire; Dover, New Hampshire; Tupelo, Mississippi; Cushing, Oklahoma; Westfield, New Jersey; Manassas, Virginia; Encinitas, California; and Douglas, Georgia. Together these cities represent some of the nation's best and most

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<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*

successful revitalized downtowns. Some of these cities were highlighted in articles about successful Main Street Programs and others are past winners of the National Main Street Center's Great American Main Street Awards.

All ten of the towns involved in the model historically had vibrant commercial districts. Many of the municipalities faced similar challenges after leading manufacturing and other industries pulled out in the 1970s and 1980s. Moreover, these communities suffered population loss to the growing suburbanization and the resulting flight of businesses to indoor malls and strip retail centers.

Among the successful programs, at least five elements stand out as essential to Main Street revitalization. They are: city support, public and private partnerships, creating a focal point downtown, effective promotions to the community, and staging events and celebrations of community.

### ***City Support***

One of the most important factors in having a thriving program is a strong relationship between the city government and the Main Street organization. Without city support most of the projects to revive Main Street will face major roadblocks, or worse not be implemented at all. The type and level of city involvement varies, but almost always it includes zoning laws, financial support, and streetscape projects.

In Greenville, South Carolina, a 2003 Great American Main Street winner, revitalization efforts date to the 1970s. The mayor began with a city beautification plan. A streetscape project that added lighting fixtures, wider sidewalks, parks, public spaces and façade improvements followed. In the next phase, traffic patterns changed. Streets went from four-lanes to two-lanes with the old lanes serving as free parking space along



the street. The city hired consultants from San Francisco to generate a master plan for the district. Other city assistance included a three-year business license tax reduction program and market study for Main Street businesses.<sup>39</sup>

Encinitas, California, a 2004 Great American Main Street Award winner, acquired money from the city to restore an old Highway 101 sign. The old sign, once an icon along the highway, was returned to use and again became an identifying landmark for the town.<sup>40</sup> In Douglas Georgia, Main Street 21st Century, Inc., created a façade restoration grant program with funds it obtained from the city.<sup>41</sup> In Westfield, New Jersey, another 2004 Great American Main Street Award winning community, the downtown has benefited from city improvements including new streetlights, planting trees, and the restoration of a lake overlook. Additionally, a committee created to look at the state of traffic, recommended building a parking garage which town council approved.<sup>42</sup> In Cushing, Iowa, the city provides \$20,000 annually funding and financial backing for infrastructure improvements.<sup>43</sup> In Tupelo, Mississippi, the city is a major

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<sup>39</sup> “Greenville, South Carolina,” *Main Street News*, June no.197(2003):2-3. [pdf document] [available at: <http://awards.mainstreet.org/MediaLibrary/2003GAMSAGreenvilleSC.pdf> accessed on 20 April 2005.], 2.

<sup>40</sup> “Encinitas, California,” *Main Street News*, May no.207 (2004):2-4. [pdf document] [available at <http://www.mainstreet.org/MediaLibrary/2004GAMSAEncinitasCA.pdf> accessed on: 10 February 2005.], 4.

<sup>41</sup> Victoria S. Russell, “Downtown Main Street Douglas, Georgia,” *Economic Development Journal* 1 no.1 (2002):35-40. Available at Academic Search Premier [database on-line]; <http://search.epnet.com/direct.asp?an=7548947&db=aph> (Boston, MA: EBSCO Publication, accessed 21 July 2004), 36.

<sup>42</sup> “Westfield, New Jersey,” *Main Street News*, May no.207 (200):2-4. [pdf document] [available at <http://www.mainstreet.org/MediaLibrary/2004GAMSAWestfieldNJ.pdf> accessed on: 10 February 2005.], 15.

<sup>43</sup> Kent Robertson, “Dissecting the Main Street Approach,” *Public Management*, 85 no.1 (2003):16-24 Available from Business Source Premier [database on-line]; <http://search.epnet.com/direct.asp?an=9371391&db=buh> (Boston, MA: EBSCO Publication, accessed 21 July 2004), 19.

financial backer of the Downtown Tupelo Main Street Association. The city pays the executive director's salary and contributes \$20,000 annually to the program's operations.<sup>44</sup>

### ***Public and Private Partnerships***

Along with creating a strong partnership between the city government and the Main Street Program, the program must involve the broader community in order to build a lasting revitalization plan. This is also one of the eight principles and is a vital part of making Main Street a success because many of these partnerships join business leaders, land developers and other government agencies. Through a joint private and public effort and the partnerships they create, communities again start seeing their Main Streets grow.

In Burlington, Iowa, the Main Street Program won the 2004 Great American Main Street Award for the achievements it has made in the past 18 years. One of elements vital to its success is the partnership with local small businesses. The Southeast Iowa Entrepreneurial Center is a joint venture with the Main Street organization, the downtown merchants association and the Small Business Development Center.<sup>45</sup>

Other cities have found equally beneficial partnerships within the community. The Encinitas, California, program offers up to \$1,000 discount to businesses that utilize local architectural firms for façade improvements.<sup>46</sup> The Main Street Program in

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<sup>44</sup> Matthew J Mowry, "Reclaiming Main Street," *Business NH Magazine*, 20 no.3 (2003): 16-24. Available from Regional Business News [database on-line]; <http://search.epnet.com/direct.asp?an=9201120&db=bwh> (Boston, MA: EBSCO Publication, accessed 21 July 2004), 18-19.

<sup>45</sup> "Burlington Iowa," *Main Street News*, May no.207 (2004):2-4. [pdf document] [available at <http://www.mainstreet.org/MediaLibrary/2004GAMSABurlingtonIA.pdf> accessed on: 10 February 2005.],

<sup>46</sup> "Encinitas, California," 5.

Douglas, Georgia, worked with five local banks to form a low interest loan program to assist redevelopment.<sup>47</sup>

Part of stimulating new growth in traditional downtowns is working with businesses and developers wishing to locate in the district. Creating partnerships among potential business owners is important, and equally important is generating collaboration with developers. Because of these relationships between developer and Main Street organization result in turning some of the largest vacant buildings are often turned into vibrant key pieces of the revitalization puzzle. In Jaffrey, New Hampshire, the Main Street group worked with a private developer to renovate an old mill into a housing complex.<sup>48</sup> Burlington, Iowa, is now home an upscale restaurant located in an old warehouse. A local restaurateur organized investors, many of whom were Main Street volunteers, to convert the empty building. Moreover, the town worked with local developers to save a mill from demolition. The developers offered financial support, and the Main Street group provided volunteers as labor to restore the old building. Today the mill is the center to the town's antique district.<sup>49</sup>

Cushing, Oklahoma, instituted a block captain program that organized business and property owners. Part of their duties included recruiting businesses. This approach, which makes the recruiting and organizing efforts more personal, is important in smaller towns.<sup>50</sup> Greenville Commons came from the first public/private partnership in Greenville, South Carolina. The complex, completed in 1982, established a downtown

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<sup>47</sup> Russell, 37.

<sup>48</sup> Mowry, 18.

<sup>49</sup> "Burlington, Iowa," 2-3.

<sup>50</sup> Robertson, 19.

anchor. The facility includes an office complex, convention center and Hyatt Regency hotel.<sup>51</sup> The Manassas Main Street and the Prince William/Manassas Conference and Visitors Bureau joined together to implement a tourism marketing strategy.<sup>52</sup>

Besides working with local businesses and developers, cities successful in re-establishing Main Streets draw on other governmental agencies for support. Working with state and federal groups brings more financial resources into the plans. Westfield, New Jersey, was able to restore an old railroad station with the assistance of the New Jersey Department of Transportation.<sup>53</sup>

### ***Focal Point Downtown***

In a time before shopping malls and big box retailers, people did not need a reason to go downtown. Today the story is vastly different. One of the biggest issues when attempting to breathe life back into old Main Street is getting people on the street to see the gains made in new business and other services. Again, this element is one of the eight principles—identification of and capitalization on existing assets.<sup>54</sup> This element shows what makes Main Street unique. The buildings, other facilities and atmosphere on Main Street offer a sharp contrast to the mass-produced, cookie-cutter buildings that exist in the suburban areas.

In most cases, towns have found that bringing a centerpiece to downtown boosts interest within the community and from visitors. In many towns old theaters fill this need

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<sup>51</sup> “Greenville, South Carolina,” 2.

<sup>52</sup> “Manassas, Virginia,” *Main Street News*, June no. 97 (2003):5-7, [pdf document] [available at <http://www.mainstreet.org/MediaLibrary/2003GAMSAManassasVA.pdf> accessed on: 10 February 2005.], 6-7.

<sup>53</sup> “Westfield, New Jersey,” 15.

<sup>54</sup> Tyler, 176.

quite well. While they no longer offer big name, first-run movies, these grand old movie palaces serve the community as multifunctional entertainment centers. Jaffrey, New Hampshire, is attempting this route.<sup>55</sup> The Westfield Main Street organization united a campaign to save the old Rialto Theater, still a functioning movie house. In 1997, the new owner added three screens to the 1920s facility and plans to use one or two of them to show art and foreign films.<sup>56</sup> An old opera house in Manassas, Virginia, now houses a restaurant, two art galleries and apartments, while an old church was converted into a performance center now housing a professional theatre company. Also in Manassas, the Old Town square has become the centerpiece of the district. This town square connects shops, restaurants, cultural arts center, the visitors' center, an ice skating rink and an outdoor pavilion.<sup>57</sup>

Downtown Tupelo, Mississippi, has focused on its many important facilities. City Hall, the County Courthouse, and a convention center all attract people to the district.<sup>58</sup> Cushing, Oklahoma, has an old railroad depot as a railroad museum.<sup>59</sup> Greenville, South Carolina, has the Peace Center for Performing Arts and the BI-LO Center, a 17,000 seat arena, all in their Main Street area.<sup>60</sup> Two major landmark buildings in Burlington, Iowa, provide the city different focal points. First, a 150-year-old department store now houses

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<sup>55</sup> Mowry, 18

<sup>56</sup> "Westfield, New Jersey," 15; Suzette Stalker, "Rialto Owner To Double Total Screens," *The Westfield Leader*, 7 August, 1997, [available at: <http://www.goleader.com/97stories/97aug07rialto.htm> accessed on 5 April 2005], 1.

<sup>57</sup> "Manassas, Virginia," 6.

<sup>58</sup> Robertson, 18.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, 19.

<sup>60</sup> "Greenville, South Carolina," 2.

the Southeast Iowa Entrepreneurial Center, an insurance company, and a bookstore. The old Hotel Burlington now provides downtown with 75 housing units, many of which qualify as affordable housing, a ballroom, and offices.

### ***Promotions to the Community***

Everyone knows that a town has a Main Street, but both the distressing state of so many these traditional commercial areas and the stirring appeal of big box retailers have severely limited the number of customers on Main Street. Sadly, only a small percentage of the people are aware of current activities in the district. Obviously, promotional activities can have a major impact on Main Street redevelopment efforts.

Communicating with the community and surrounding areas is vital in bringing customers back to Main Street. Until people know that retail shops and cultural activities are awaiting the public, these stores and events cannot attract a substantial numbers of shoppers and attendees.

Part of the Main Street Approach includes marketing and promoting businesses to the community; however, many towns go far beyond basic information. Westfield, New Jersey, publishes a newsletter, *Talk of the Town*, which informs residents from several towns about the activities on Main Street. They also produce *Destination Westfield*, a publication that lists business opportunities in the downtown area. In addition to these publications, the Main Street group distributes a shopping directory listing all of the businesses in Westfield to over 60,000 households in the surrounding area.<sup>61</sup>

A large part of the overall strategy of the Main Street Program in Douglas, Georgia, is to sell the district to the community. Their marketing strategy and action plan

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<sup>61</sup> “Westfield. New Jersey,” 15.

call for several brochures. One is to promote the town to retail business for recruiting and another is to promote antique shopping and historic destinations. Other promotional tactics include speaking engagements for the Main Street Director to share the town's success with others and a mystery shopping program to help make the downtown an exciting place to shop.<sup>62</sup> Dover, New Hampshire, implemented a downtown gift certificate program allowing shoppers to redeem the certificates at any Main Street store.<sup>63</sup> Similarly, Tupelo, Mississippi, has the "Downtown Dollars" program and a "yellow pages" business phonebook.<sup>64</sup>

### *Events and Celebrations of Community*

Closely related to promoting local businesses through advertising and brochures is providing exciting events and celebrations that attract people and allow them to associate Main Street with having a good time. These events highlight many aspects of current life on Main Street. Many towns choose to feature events directly related to the community and its history, while others combine community related activities and nonspecific events to emphasize the new businesses on Main Street.

Tupelo, Mississippi, lays claim to the birthplace of rock and roll legend Elvis Presley. The Main Street organization has found a way to benefit from the Presley phenomenon. Every year since 1999, the town has hosted a summer event called the Elvis Presley Festival. The organization uses this festival, which attracts 15,000 people annually, as a fundraiser.<sup>65</sup>

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<sup>62</sup> Russell 38, 40.

<sup>63</sup> Mowry, 18.

<sup>64</sup> Robertson, 18.

<sup>65</sup> Robertson, 18.

While not every town is fortunate enough to be the birthplace of a world renowned celebrity, many have other historic and cultural assets to showcase. Dover, New Hampshire, is calling attention to its long history as the seventh-oldest settlement in the nation. The town has highlighted its heritage and allows visitors to see a glimpse of its storied history through old photographs mounted on historical markers. In addition to the history, Dover's Main Street group sponsors an annual clean up of downtown. This event attracts over 300 volunteers.<sup>66</sup> Like many other towns Burlington, Iowa, conducts a massive events and celebration campaign. These include sale promotions around holidays such as Mother's and Father's Days and Easter. The town also hosts the Snake Alley Criterium bicycle race. Heritage Days celebration promotes the history of the Main Street district and Iowa Downtown Month highlights the efforts of revitalization in the district.<sup>67</sup>

Encinitas, California, hosts a variety of events. Many are related to the beach and surfer heritage of the town. Wavecrest Woodies celebrate Highway 101, which is also the town's Main Street, and the model of automobile known as the Woodie. The town is home to the 101 Arts Colony and hosts several events including art shows and poetry readings.<sup>68</sup>

Besides creating events that last only a few days, several of the towns have longer running activities, such as a farmer's market that lasts from late spring until fall. Both

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<sup>66</sup> Mowry, 18.

<sup>67</sup> "Special Events," [website] Burlington, IA,: Downtown Partners, Inc., 2005. [available at: <http://www.downtownpartnersinc.com/events.php> accessed on: 18 February 2005], 1.

<sup>68</sup> "Special Events," [website] Encinitas, CA,: Downtown Encinitas Main Street Association, nd, [available at: <http://www.encinitas101.com/special.htm> accessed on: 2 April, 2005 ], 1.



Burlington, Iowa, and Tupelo, Mississippi, have established these venues with much success.<sup>69</sup> In Jaffrey, New Hampshire, 5,000 people participated in the “Scarecrows on the Commons” event to create 500 scarecrows for display in the town.<sup>70</sup> During the summer, downtown Cushing, Oklahoma, hosts the annual reunion for the town’s high school.<sup>71</sup>

These five elements—city support, private public partnership, focal point downtown, promotion to the community, and events and celebration of community—occur frequently among some of the nation’s most successful Main Street communities. Some of the elements overlap the National Main Street’s four-point approach such as promotions and events. Additionally, two of the successful elements, public-private partnership and capitalization on existing assets, coincide with the eight principles of success.

Quantifying the accomplishments of a Main Street program takes many forms since there is no one method to gauge success. Most programs often judge progress through economic numbers: sales volume, sales tax collection, building rehabilitations, occupancy, jobs created and investment dollars. One significant measure of success comes from the amount of money reinvested into Main Street. For Burlington, Iowa, 18 years of revitalization efforts has meant over \$28 million in downtown improvements.<sup>72</sup>

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<sup>69</sup> “Burlington, Iowa,” 4; Robertson, 18.

<sup>70</sup> Mowry, 18.

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*, 19.

<sup>72</sup> “Burlington, Iowa,” 2.

Similarly, Encinitas, California, has seen \$23 million in public and private enhancements.<sup>73</sup>

Private investments in Manassas, Virginia, total \$12 million.<sup>74</sup> As of 2001, the New Hampshire Main Street program collectively has seen over \$15 million in various building rehabilitations and other improvements.<sup>75</sup> Success for Westfield, New Jersey, equates to a \$200 million sales volume for businesses and a 98 percent occupancy rate.<sup>76</sup> Correspondingly, in Manassas, Virginia, retailers experienced a 42 percent increase in sales, added 350 new jobs and rehabilitated 54 buildings.<sup>77</sup> Burlington, Iowa, rehabilitated 376 buildings, added 189 new businesses, 441 new jobs since 1986.<sup>78</sup>

The National Main Street Program's methodology clearly invigorates traditional business districts. The program capitalizes on a community's assets and rebuilds the economic base through a well planned and systematic approach. Before the National Main Street Program, cities attempted a variety of tactics to combat urban decay. Cities have historically had problems from sanitation, to blight, to slums; however, the rapid post-war suburbanization accelerated and produced more concerns for communities. The earliest solutions to the growing problems, in fact, created many other problems. Urban renewal became synonymous with no renewal as cities razed block after block in hopes of new development. After 25 years, the National Main Street Program illustrates what

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<sup>73</sup> "Encinitas, California," 4.

<sup>74</sup> "Manassas, Virginia," 7.

<sup>75</sup> Mowry, 20.

<sup>76</sup> "Westfield, New Jersey," 14.

<sup>77</sup> "Manassas, Virginia," 7.

<sup>78</sup> "Burlington, Iowa," 3.

many urban renewal projects lacked, a real connection the community. Where urban renewal knocked down old, often historically or architecturally significant structures, the Main Street Program embraced the old buildings and celebrated their importance to the community. Those who embraced urban renewal thought that clearing away the old to make room for the new would automatically attract development. Instead cleared blocks deemed blighted remained vast empty lots for many years. The Main Street Program acknowledged that revitalization is a whole community effort that takes time to evolve into a strong program.

## Chapter III

### **Renewal Efforts in West Virginia**

#### **Introduction**

As the urban renewal idea began catching on with more and more towns, it seemed as though almost every city attempted some sort of project. Those in West Virginia were no exception. Towns across the state created new pedestrian malls, housing complexes, and other public projects. As Interstate Highways 64, 77 and 79 came through the Mountain State, neighborhoods were changed, others were destroyed, while still other towns were completely by-passed. Interstate Highways 68, 70, and 81 equally affected towns in throughout northern part of the state. During the late 1960s and early 1970s, West Virginia towns also encountered the same problems faced by many other cities.

Unfortunately, West Virginia began its urban renewal activities at the same time as the national economy underwent major restructuring that particularly harmed the state. The decline of the state's industrial base plus the inflation of the late 1970s and the recession of the early 1980s took its toll on communities. The Kanawha Valley relied on coal, chemical and manufacturing industries, and its towns had large numbers of residents employed in those plants and factories. As those industries laid-off employees or shut down operations, towns lost many residents. In addition, the new Interstate 64 between the state's largest cities, Charleston and Huntington, began diverting development to rural unincorporated areas between the two. Small towns and larger cities in West Virginia needed new strategies to be competitive in this new era. Most municipalities saw urban

renewal, with its federal dollars, as the solution. However, often these projects—like many others across the nation—failed to return on their promise.

By the 1980s, communities began to find successful revitalization in the Main Street Program. Governor Arch Moore initiated contact with the National Main Street Center, and in several towns in West Virginia have rejuvenated their traditional business districts with this approach in the years since. These communities offer local examples that the Main Street Approach works throughout the country and in varying sizes of communities normally under 50,000 population. One of these is St. Albans, West Virginia.

### **Urban Renewal in West Virginia**

Being a large federal program, money from the urban renewal program was bound to find its way into communities across West Virginia. Since many people, especially politicians, equated these projects with progress, it was inevitable that many older, underused or neglected areas of towns would become the perfect focal points for the new projects and their promises of revitalization. Huntington, West Virginia, was built in the 1870s as the western terminal of the Chesapeake and Ohio (C&O) Railroad by its owner Collis P. Huntington. Situated along the Ohio River, the city has become the hub of a tri-state region including the cities of Ashland, Kentucky, and Ironton, Ohio, and is West Virginia's second largest city.

During the 1970s, the city embarked on several urban renewal projects. In 1971, the Huntington Urban Renewal Authority began the “Superblock” project. A nine-acre tract faced the wrecking ball to make room for a new development. The next year, Arlen Realty and Development Corporation agreed to build a \$20 million shopping center at the

site. Two years later, the project stalled when the developer could not find an anchor store. The Superblock area remained empty throughout the 1970s, 1980s, 1990s, and into the first years of the 21st Century. Proposals for development continued throughout those decades. The ideas for the Superblock included hotels, office buildings, an off-track betting complex, a factory outlet shopping center, a cultural exhibit center, a \$110 million office tower, and a city parking garage and bus station. The only development that actually occurred during this time was a restaurant and a hotel. Finally, in 2000 a plan for a \$60 million “leisure destination” with retail and entertainment outlets and restaurants was unveiled. This planned complex eventually became Pullman Square. Groundbreaking occurred in December 2002, 31 years after the initial urban renewal project began. Another Huntington urban renewal project during the 1970s created a pedestrian mall on 9th Street. The mall did not work out as a major shopping destination because the Barboursville mall, a large indoor shopping center located outside the city near Interstate 64. Projects that did improve the city over the years were a new civic center, library, post office and a parking garage.<sup>1</sup>

West Virginia’s capital city experienced its own urban renewal difficulties and successes. The first problem facing Charleston was the route Interstate 64 would take. The proposed route crossed the Kanawha River twice, providing the city with two new bridges but destroying the downtown African-American area known as the Triangle

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<sup>1</sup>“Superblock/Pullman Square timeline,” *Huntington Herald-Dispatch*, nd., [online available at: <http://www.herald-dispatch.com/webextras/PullmanSquare/timeline.htm> accessed on 8 January, 2005]; James E. Casto, *Huntington: An Illustrated History*, Northridge, CA: (Windsor Publications), 1985, 98-100.

District. After much debate and many legal battles, the Interstate Highway project continued through its original path and 4,000 residents lost their homes.<sup>2</sup>

In Charleston, much like Huntington, the Superblock concept was highly touted in the 1970s. An area near two new Interstate exits and the civic center, including much of the Triangle District, looked promising for the anticipated development. It sat empty for several years; however, until Mayor John Hutchinson successfully pushed for a shopping mall on the vacant property beginning in 1977. It would be three more years before a clear plan took shape. The three-story Charleston Town Center filled a two-block area and a Marriot hotel located on the Lee Street side of the new mall. When the Town Center opened in 1983, it was the largest inner-city shopping mall east of the Mississippi River.<sup>3</sup>

The Town Center promised to be a downtown anchor for shopping, but it also drained the traditional commercial district on Capitol Street. Many of the large department stores took up residence as the Town Center's anchor stores. The relocated stores were national retailers, and other specialty shops joined them. Many other local shops and department stores simply closed.<sup>4</sup> Over the next decade, the Charleston Urban Renewal Authority would focus its revitalization efforts on this traditional downtown

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<sup>2</sup> Ramona Taylor Williams, "Guest Perspective," *Development Leadership Network News*, 6 no.1 (2001):1 [available at: <http://www.developmentleadership.net/newsletter/jan20005.htm> accessed on: 7 April 2005.]; John G Morgan and Robert J. Byers, *Charleston 200*, (Charleston, W.V.;: Charleston Gazette), 1994, 158.

<sup>3</sup> Charleston Convention and Visitors Bureau, "History," [website] Charleston, WV: Charleston Convention and Visitors Bureau, 2002, [available at: <http://www.charlestonwv.com/about/history.asp> accessed on 5 April 2005.]; Morgan, 163.

<sup>4</sup> Morgan, 165

area. The Capitol Street revitalization employed a number of strategies associated with the Main Street Program, but it was never formally a part of the program.

The interest in urban renewal drew both large cities and smaller municipalities. For example, Dunbar, West Virginia, a small town eight miles west of Charleston, began several urban renewal projects in 1965. The city closed 12th Street to traffic and created a pedestrian-only plaza. In the same area as the plaza, businesses and homes from 10th to 12th Streets were leveled. In addition to the mall, this town of a little over 9,000 people in the early 1970s secured federal funding for two parking lots. One of the lots in the 1200 block of Myers Avenue destroyed some of the town's oldest buildings. The other parking lot at the 1200 block of Dunbar Avenue razed several other businesses and residences. The town's urban renewal projects did bring a senior citizen high-rise residence and a new library, but the mall has struggled.<sup>5</sup> Across the river from Dunbar, St. Albans also turned to urban renewal with results discussed below.

### **Main Street Program in West Virginia**

As these problems with urban renewal became evident, eight years into the National Main Street Program, West Virginia created its own state program. After official acceptance into the program, in 1988, Bluefield, Buckhannon, Clarksburg, New Martinsville, Parkersburg, and Wheeling became the first West Virginia communities to participate in the Main Street Program. The next year, five more towns joined. Twenty-five communities have participated at some point in Main Street West Virginia between 1988 and 2002. Currently twelve towns are certified. According to Main Street West

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<sup>5</sup> J. C. Dillion, Jr., ed. *West Virginia Blue Book 1975*. (Charleston, WV.:Jarrett Printing Co.), 1975. 864; Ova H. Tolley, *History of Dunbar*, (Dunbar, WV: Dunbar Printing), 2001, 26.



Virginia, “[M]any programs fail to become certified because of funding problems.”<sup>6</sup> The state program provides technical assistance, planning and leadership to the local communities, but no financial support. It is the local program’s responsibility to raise funds.<sup>7</sup>

Several towns in the state are finding success. Main Street Morgantown, a member since 1991, effectively revitalized the town’s Main Street district. In 1998, the National Main Street Center recognized Morgantown’s revitalization success by presenting it with the Great American Main Street Award. The endeavors of the organization have brought great success to the entire downtown, which includes several blocks and the wharf district. This area has experienced 173 new businesses, 928 new jobs and \$28 million in investment since the Main Street program began. The program assists local merchants and property owners with several grant programs. Five local banks participate in a low interest loan program geared toward aiding in façade improvement and new construction. Main Street Morgantown also provides a matching grant, up to \$1000, for smaller non-bank financed projects. West Virginia University has played an important supportive role with its extensive riverfront projects.<sup>8</sup>

Martinsburg, located in the eastern panhandle, has been a member of the state program since 1992. Main Street Martinsburg provides a low interest loan program for property owners to restore their older buildings. A group of seven local banks participate in the program. Property owners use the funds to improve building façades, storefront

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<sup>6</sup> Main Street West Virginia, “History of Main Street West Virginia,” Pamphlet.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 2

<sup>8</sup> Main Street Morgantown, “About the Main Street organization,” [website] Morgantown, WV: Main Street Morgantown, nd., [available at <http://www.downtownmorgantown.com/pages/OrgSERVICES.html> accessed on: 5 April 2005.]

signs and sidewalks.<sup>9</sup> In addition to the loan program, the organization is planning a town square project to make better use of public space. The project is waiting funding through the West Virginia Department of Transportation.<sup>10</sup>

Main Street West Virginia certified the Harpers Ferry Main Street program in 2001. Harpers Ferry is very small town; however, it is a historically significant town. It is unique in that it has a National Park within its business district. The Main Street program has been working to make the historic town's Main Street area prosperous. Harpers Ferry Main Street plans a streetscape project, restoration of historic buildings, and an innovative marketing strategy. The organization supports local business owners by providing tax credits for rehabilitations, workshops on the retail industry and assistance for historic preservation.<sup>11</sup>

Wheeling, West Virginia, was one of the first towns selected for the Main Street West Virginia program. Although not a currently certified Main Street community, Wheeling was an early success story and has many attractions within its downtown. In 1989, the Centre Market reopened as downtown centerpiece. Today, the 1850 historic cast iron marketplace houses restaurants, antique shops, a book store, a pharmacy, a

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<sup>9</sup> Main Street Martinsburg, "Director's Corner," [website] Martinsburg, WV: Main Street Martinsburg, 2005, [available at <http://www.mainstreetmartinsburg.com/loanpool.cfm> accessed on: 5 April 2005.]

<sup>10</sup> Main Street Martinsburg, "Martinsburg's Downtown Plan: Town Square," [website] Martinsburg, WV: Main Street Martinsburg, 2005, [available at [http://www.mainstreetmartinsburg.com/news\\_details.cfm?newsID=19](http://www.mainstreetmartinsburg.com/news_details.cfm?newsID=19) accessed on: 5 April 2005.]

<sup>11</sup> Harpers Ferry Main Street, "Main Street Project," [website] Harpers Ferry, WV: Harpers Ferry Main Street, 2004, [available at <http://www.harpersferryinfocenter.org/mainStreet Projects.htm> accessed on: 5 April 2005.]; Harpers Ferry Main Street, "Main Street," [website] Harpers Ferry, WV: Harpers Ferry Main Street, 2004, [available at [http://www.harpersferryinfocenter.org/main\\_street.htm](http://www.harpersferryinfocenter.org/main_street.htm) accessed on: 5 April 2005.]

produce market, and a butcher shop. The town also has a walking tour of several Victorian homes.<sup>12</sup>

### **Main Street Revitalization, St. Albans, West Virginia**

The process of revitalizing the Main Street district for St. Albans has been an ongoing part of the city's plan for several decades. The efforts made in the early 1980s were a direct response to the decline of traditional commercial areas, the introduction of indoor malls and strip developments along U. S. Route 60 and the shifting living and working patterns created by the construction of Interstate 64. Although successful at the outset, the Olde Main Plaza pedestrian mall, opened in 1981, did not produce the long-term reinvigoration the town desired. By the late 1990s, Olde Main Plaza stood virtually deserted as business after business closed down or moved to other locations.

In 1999, concerned citizens established the St. Albans Renaissance Group (SARG) to begin a new revitalization effort on Olde Main Plaza. As a first step, Olde Main Plaza was nominated to the National Register of Historic Places in 2000. By 2001, SARG became a member of Main Street West Virginia.<sup>13</sup> In the years since SARG was formed, the group has made strides toward revitalizing Main Street with much of the effort focused on highlighting the town's long history.

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<sup>12</sup>Wheeling Convention and Visitors Bureau [website] Wheeling, WV: Wheeling Convention and Visitors Bureau, nd, [available at <http://www.wheelingcvb.com/> accessed 20 April 2005.]

<sup>13</sup> Rosemary, Clendenin, "Main Street in St. Albans Has a Rich Heritage," *St. Albans Monthly*, August 2004.

## St. Albans

### *Early History*

Evidence of the earliest known inhabitants of the St. Albans area were discovered in 1963. That winter, after a period of high water, large chunks of the bank along the Kanawha River and U. S. Route 60 broke away exposing soil with multiple layers of deposits and artifacts.<sup>14</sup> Archeologists uncovered projectiles, charcoal and other soil deposits showing occupation in the area dating to 9,000 BC.<sup>15</sup> The site held one of the most significant prehistoric finds in the state and nation.

Although there were explorations at mid-century, permanent European settlers began coming to the convergence of the Kanawha and Coal Rivers in the late 1700s. A group of Virginia Rangers erected the first permanent settlement in the St. Albans area and built a stockade known as Fort Tackett circa 1789. In 1790, settlers and Native Americans engaged in several skirmishes. These fights resulted in a number of settlers wounded, killed and captured. In the second assault later that year, the Native Americans burned the fort.<sup>16</sup>

Another early settler, Thomas Teays, first came to the area in 1781 after receiving a 27,000 acre land grant for military service to the Virginia Commonwealth. The next year, Shawnees captured Teays while he surveyed his land. After escaping from his captors, Teays never returned to his land in the Kanawha Valley. However, in 1793 his

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<sup>14</sup> Bettye Broyles, 1971 Second Preliminary Report: The St. Albans Site, Kanawha County, West Virginia, Report of Archeological Investigations No. 3, West Virginia Geological and Economic Survey, Morgantown, 3.

<sup>15</sup> Paul D. Marshall, *St. Albans: Historic and Architectural Survey*, (Charleston, West Virginia: Paul D. Marshall and Associates), 1983, 1-4

<sup>16</sup> St. Albans Historical Society, *St. Albans History*. Walsworth Publishing Co., 1993, 8; Marshall, 8-9

son Stephen settled on his father's land on the west side of the Coal River. Where he established a ferry service in 1800 and built an inn for travelers on the Old State Road.<sup>17</sup>

As a young land speculator, George Washington surveyed much of the land in the Kanawha Valley. At the time of his death in 1799, Washington owned 23,266 acres of land throughout the valley.<sup>18</sup> Washington's will divided his vast land holdings among 23 nieces and nephews. Elizabeth Spotswood inherited the tract of land where St. Albans would develop. Spotswood sold several 100 acres of the land in 1810 to Morris Hudson, who moved into the area with his wife and six children. Hudson built a small Episcopal church on the east side of the Coal River in 1825, standing today as St. Mark's.<sup>19</sup>

### ***A Town Emerges***

Philip R. Thompson purchased property from the Spotswoods near the Hudson land circa 1817. Ten years later, in 1827, Thompson sold 744 acres of the land to his son Phillip R. Thompson, Jr. for the sum of one dollar.<sup>20</sup> In 1829, Thompson began laying out a town on his property along the Coal River. Early settlers started calling the area Coalsmouth because of its location at the mouth of the Coal River. As Thompson developed his land for a town, he decided to call his settlement Philippi, after himself, in 1834. Along with his new town, Thompson also erected, during this time,<sup>21</sup> a large stone house he called Muckamore. The name Muckamore honored his ancestral homeland of

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<sup>17</sup> Marshall, 9

<sup>18</sup> *St. Albans History*, 13

<sup>19</sup> Dean Braley, *Coalsmouth: A History of St. Albans, West Virginia 1673-1926*, (St. Albans, West Virginia: St. Albans Press), 2003, 36.

<sup>20</sup> Deed Record # G231, Kanawha County Courthouse, Kanawha County, West Virginia

<sup>21</sup> The exact date of the building of the house could not be ascertained. According to *St. Albans History*, President Andrew Jackson visited the home in 1832.

Ireland.<sup>22</sup> The house was located at the intersection of Main and C Streets; today this location is a part of the Loop area. Thompson built a second home in 1833 as a wedding present to his son Phillip R. Thompson, Jr. Now known as Ravenswood, it is the second oldest house in St. Albans.<sup>23</sup>

One of the most significant developments in the early years of St. Albans (Coalsmouth) centered on the extension of the James River and Kanawha Turnpike. The road project began in 1821 to link eastern Virginia to the Ohio River. The St. Albans section began in 1828 and was completed four years later.<sup>24</sup> This road, which later became U. S. Route 60, created a main thoroughfare in the town and defined a new commercial district. James Teays, grandson of Thomas, built a six-room house near the new road. He converted the house into a tavern and stage stop in 1831.

Teays and Thompson operated a toll bridge on the Coal River. The James River and Kanawha Turnpike Company had planned to construct their own toll bridge across the river. Teays and Thompson fought the building of a second bridge. They won a legal decision against the turnpike company and stopped construction of the second bridge. The James River and Kanawha Turnpike Company then used the Teays/Thompson bridge and in the process changed the route of the road.<sup>25</sup>

The placement of the new road created the town's Main Street. As travelers made use of the turnpike, businesses catering to their needs sprang up along the road. The post office was located at the mouth of the Coal River before the turnpike, but it moved to the James Teays Tavern to be more accessible to the stage coach. Other businesses along the

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<sup>22</sup> *St. Albans History*, 5; Braley, 44; Marshall, 25.

<sup>23</sup> Marshall, 12.

<sup>25</sup> Marshall 11-12; Braley, 45.

road included a blacksmith shop, carpenter shop, two doctors' offices and a Methodist meeting hall.<sup>26</sup>

### ***Coal River Brings Commerce***

The Coal River is one of the most significant factors in the development of St. Albans. As the little town at the mouth of the river grew, the river soon brought new sources of commerce to the town: coal and lumber.

John Peter Salley, the first white man to travel on the Coal, found the first coal deposits in the state. Floating down the river in 1742, Salley saw outcroppings of cannel coal, a fine grain type of coal which can be refined into lamp oil, along its banks.<sup>27</sup> Many believe this is the basis for the river's name; however, another theory asserts that the river was named for Samuel Cole a member of the Big Sandy Expedition in 1756. Throughout the town's early history both spellings—Colesmouth and Coalsmouth—were used.<sup>28</sup>

The first cannel coal shipped down the Coal River in 1850. The year before, William Madison Peyton had chartered the Coal River Navigation Company to improve conditions on the river. The company's first project manually cleared the river to improve navigation for boats, but the endeavor did not help river conditions. Peyton then pooled his resources with the other cannel coal operators to design a new plan for improving navigation on the Coal. The new plan sought to allow larger steamboats and barges to pilot the river. The group hired William S. Rosecrans for the venture. Rosecrans, a former Army Corps of Engineers officer, proposed an eight lock and dam

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<sup>26</sup> Marshall, 12.

<sup>27</sup> Stan Cohen and Richard Andre, *Kanawha Country Images A Bicentennial History 1788-1988*. (Charleston, West Virginia: Pictorial Histories Publishing Co.), 1987, 69.

<sup>28</sup> Marshall 5, 15.

system for the river. The system provided a 35 mile slackwater on the Coal. In 1859, the four-year project was completed. After construction, Rosecrans resigned to work on a cannel coal refinery in Cincinnati, but soon became a prominent Union general and returned to western Virginia during the Civil War.<sup>29</sup> Rosecrans fought in battle at Carnifex Ferry near Summersville, a battle which helped the Union Army control the Kanawha Valley.<sup>30</sup>

War and a major flood in September 1861 disrupted coal production. Repairs to the damaged locks and dams restored the industry, but not until 1867. By 1884, over 500,000 tons of cannel coal had come down the river. Around this time, however, the coal seams played out and kerosene replaced cannel coal as the major form of lamp fuel. Also, railroads began replacing boats and barges as the main shipping vehicle.<sup>31</sup> The C&O Railroad, completed in 1873, passed through St. Albans as a major coal hauling railroad.

As the cannel coal industry sank, the timber industry rapidly took hold in the area. The river once again played a vital part in its development. The timber being sent down the Coal River did not need a lock and dam system. St. Albans' placement at the mouth of the Coal served it well as the timber industry boomed. It was the logical place to construct sawmills and establish lumber companies. At its height, 1880-1910, the lumber business brought millions of dollars to local timber barons.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> Cohen, 69; Marshall 16-18.

<sup>30</sup> Otic K. Rice, *West Virginia: A History*, (Lexington, KY: University Press of Kentucky), 1985, 128-29.

<sup>31</sup> Cohen, 69.

<sup>32</sup> Bill Troutman and Linda Troutman, eds., *The Growing, Booming Years of St. Albans 1885-1910*. (Charleston, West Virginia: St. Albans Historical Society), 2003, 9.



Throughout the heyday of the timber and lumber industries, St. Albans had many prominent companies. Over the years that lumber stimulated the town's economy, many companies and their owners became fixtures in the community. William Mohler, owner of the Mohler Lumber Company, constructed a large Queen Anne style home at the corner of Pennsylvania Avenue and Kanawha Terrace. The city purchased lumber from Mohler for many public improvements and buildings.<sup>33</sup> The Bowman Lumber Company, the largest of the companies, operated for 37 years.<sup>34</sup> Several managers of this company built homes in the town. Another prominent company, the American Column and Lumber Company, produced turned columns, balusters, flooring and sheathing.<sup>35</sup>

Railroad magnate Collis P. Huntington had strong ties to the town. After a dispute with town lumber owners over the price of they charged him for materials, Huntington bought the Webb Sawmill and began producing his own lumber to fill the needs of the C&O Railroad. It was Huntington, operating under the Central Land Company, who requested that the West Virginia State Legislature in February 1871 change the name of the town to St. Albans. The change took effect the following year, 1872, which is now recognized as the founding date of the town. The name was to honor the hometown of C&O chief counsel H. C. Parsons who hailed from St. Albans, Vermont. Later Huntington built an Italianate style home for his nephew Henry in 1873-74. Montague Manufacturing Company purchased the home in 1876 and used it for the superintendent's home. Today it houses the city's Woman's Club.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> *St. Albans History*, 51, 165.

<sup>34</sup> *St. Albans History*, 51.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>36</sup> Marshall 25-26, 70.

### *Main Street, St. Albans, West Virginia*

As the town, officially called St. Albans, continued growing in the late 1800s, Main Street benefited from this expansion. More merchants established stores along the James River and Kanawha Turnpikes to serve travelers and the booming lumber industry. One of these new merchants seeking to start a business in St. Albans was C. D. Hereford. Hereford arrived from Red House Shoals (Putnam County) via the steamboat *Victor* in August 1872 to start a business in St. Albans. He found a town still early in developing both its commercial and residential life. After settling into his new home, Hereford established a very successful general merchandise store on Main Street. He also began construction of a large home on the corner of Third Street and Kanawha Terrace shortly before died in 1918.<sup>37</sup> In his recollections, Hereford describes the town: “St. Albans in 1872! It is far different to-day. Where houses and street are to-day waving grain stood then. It was only a small settlement lying on the edge of the upland along the highway upon which, up to 1870, stage coaches were driven.”<sup>38</sup> In his writing, he recalls the first businesses and the commercial district of the town: “This highway, Main street now and at that time not only the main street of the village, but in reality the only street in the village worthy of being called a street, was the James River and Kanawha Turnpike.”<sup>39</sup>

Hereford’s first encounter with the town began at the wharf located where the Coal and Kanawha Rivers meet. “On landing, I started for the town up the road, now called B street,” he recalled, “There was no walk along the road, and dust was nearly

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<sup>37</sup> *St. Albans History*, 35; St. Albans Historical Society, *Historic Properties of St. Albans*, Pamphlet.

<sup>38</sup> C. D. Hereford, *Early History of St. Albans*, reprinted by the St. Albans Historical Society, 1977, 1.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, 1-2.

ankle deep.”<sup>40</sup> Coming into town along B Street, the first home he saw belonged to James Turner. This Gothic Revival home with its steep pitched roof and decorative vergeboards built in 1832 still stands in the town.<sup>41</sup> After the Turner house, Hereford noted there were no other homes on that part of B Street. During this time, the area between Main Street and the Kanawha River was used primarily for wheat crops.<sup>42</sup>

Further up B Street, Hereford encountered the town’s print shop, the Episcopal Church (now called St. Mark’s), some homes, a Methodist Church, and another Gothic Revival structure, the Chilton House in its original location. Along Main Street, Hereford noted a bakery, shoe shop, the Peytona Cannel Coal Company’s office, a drug store and the post office. More businesses, homes and other buildings sprang up along Main Street. When the C&O Railroad linked St. Albans to the city of Huntington in 1870s, the James River and Kanawha Turnpike travelers preferred the quicker and more comfortable rail system. Hereford noted, “In 1870, the Chesapeake & Ohio Railroad was constructed through to Huntington, and from that time on, the turnpike lost more and more of its importance to the community; until now it is only the Main Street of the city.”<sup>43</sup> In 1892, John Teays erected the Apollo Hall on Main Street. This facility served the town as the entertainment center, where many organizations held social events.<sup>44</sup>

The Main Street of Hereford’s day soon met with disaster. With the availability of local lumber, all of the structures on Main Street were wooden frame construction.

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<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, 5.

<sup>41</sup> St. Albans, 163-64.

<sup>42</sup> Troutman, 5.

<sup>43</sup> Hereford, 4.

<sup>44</sup> Braley, 90

When a fire of unknown origin started in the opera house on January 31, 1906, Main Street burned quickly. To the horror of residents, on February 13 another fire broke out on Main Street. The fire, which swept through the remaining buildings, completely destroying the district started in an apartment over one of the remaining stores, the resident of the apartment died in the fire. The estimated losses, at the time, were between \$25,000 and \$60,000. The losses were great because St. Albans had no fire department at the time and, consequently, an engine had to come from Charleston via the railroad.<sup>45</sup> After the fire only five businesses and one house remained: Hereford's store and Dr. D. D. Miller's office above it, the Alford Brothers General Store, D. J. Russell's Grocery, B. W. Hensley's dry goods store, and the J.J. McCommas house.<sup>46</sup>

When rebuilding began, brick was for the new structures. The Bank of St. Albans rebuilt later that year. The building, a three-story Classical Revival, features a rounded corner front entrance. Many more buildings were completed on Main Street in 1907 and 1910; through the 1920s and 1930s more structures appeared. Other significant buildings erected during this period included: the Ivanhoe Lodge (1910), the Alban Theater (1937), Old First National Bank and Post Office (1910), and later the Coal River Insurance Company building (1950).<sup>47</sup>

### ***Main Street at Its Best***

By mid-20th Century, Main Street was a lively center of the town. After the disastrous fires, Main Street transformed from wooden structures into a group of solidly

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<sup>45</sup> *St. Albans History*, 19; Braley, 91.

<sup>46</sup> Troutman, 32.

<sup>47</sup> Neil Richardson and Alan Rowe, National Register of Historic Places nomination for Main Street district, St. Albans, WV, 2000, section 7, 1-7.

constructed buildings, many of which still stand some 100 years later. When the automobile became a vital part of American life, the old James River and Kanawha Turnpike became a primary road into and out of the city. By the 1950s, the new U. S. Route 60 bypassed the old James River and Kanawha Turnpike and Main Street. The highway ran straight along the river bank. People still traveled the old U. S. Route 60, now called Kanawha Terrace.<sup>48</sup> It functioned mainly to bring in-town shoppers to the commercial district. Main Street stretched from the Coal River Bridge to 2nd Street. On Main Street some of the businesses included several large department stores, a furniture store, a pool hall, clothing shops for men and women, a ten cent store, the Bank of St. Albans (in its first location and its later location a block to the east), a jewelry store, the Coal River Insurance Company, a Kroger grocery store and a produce stand.<sup>49</sup>

“A nice little town street,” is the way Charles Filbin, a long-time resident, remembers Main Street of the 1950s.<sup>50</sup> James Robinson worked on Main Street at the Kroger grocery store and recalls, “Everybody knew everybody and it was a treat to come down and shop.”<sup>51</sup> In 1960, the Bank of St. Albans constructed a new building in the 200 block of Main Street. This move left the grand old Bank of St. Albans building empty. The city purchased the building and moved City Hall to Main Street soon after the bank vacated.<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> Over the years of rerouting, Main Street is no longer directly connected to Kanawha Terrace. See Appendix 1.

<sup>49</sup> James Robinson, Interview by author, tape recording, St. Albans, WV., 7 April 2005; Charles Filbin, Interview by author, tape recording, St. Albans, WV., 7 April 2005.

<sup>50</sup> Filbin interview.

<sup>51</sup> Robinson interview.

<sup>52</sup> *St. Albans History*, 20.

During the 1950s, however, there were also concerns that retail shops in St. Albans could not compete with larger stores in Charleston.<sup>53</sup> Additional concerns focused on the traffic congestion on Main Street. In their 1953 city planning recommendations, the prominent Cincinnati firm, Ladislas Segoe and Associates, stated, “More serious is the situation created by movements to and from US-60, the St. Albans-Sattes[Nitro] bridge, and sections west of Coal River. This traffic has no choice but to use Main Street in the center of the St. Albans business district—making turning movements at points in the more congested part of the city.”<sup>54</sup> These concerns would intensify in the coming decades. To alleviate traffic issues, the Segoe firm recommended installing cross-town diagonal streets in sections of the town and constructing up to three parking lots. Several of the recommendations by the Segoe firm were acted upon, however, not in the exact manner stated in the report. For example, the firm recognized the need for a new City Hall and main fire department building. They suggested that the city capitalize on the Colonial Revival post office building on Sixth Avenue and construct the new facilities between the post office and armory at the corner of Third Street and Sixth Avenue. Instead, City Hall moved into the old Bank of St. Albans building and the central fire station located at the corner of Sixth Avenue and B Street, in Loop area.<sup>55</sup>

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<sup>53</sup> Ladislas Segoe and Associates, City Plan St. Albans, WV Planning and Zoning Commission 1953 Vol. 1, 14.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, 23.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, 37-38.

### *Urban Renewal comes to St. Albans*

By the late 1970s, St. Albans officials began thinking of the Main Street district again, but in the context of urban renewal. These urban renewal plans in the late 1970s would reshape the traditional Main Street district. The redirection of U. S. Route 60 to run closer to the bank of the Kanawha River changed the focus of town's commercial district. After the change of the highway, Main Street was not readily accessible to travelers using the main thoroughfare. Businesses sprang up next to U. S. Route 60. Subsequently, shopping plazas and fast-food franchises also appeared along the highway. By the 1970s, the Kanawha Valley's first indoor mall opened. Its location in St. Albans along U. S. Route 60 drained still more businesses from Main Street.

The plan to revitalize Main Street did not focus on the entire street. The city's plans sought to concentrate only on Main Street between B and 2nd Streets (see Appendices 1 and 2). This portion included City Hall and the Alban Theater. In the area of Main Street from B Street west to the bridge, all of the stores were to be demolished to construct the Loop. According to long-time residents, constructing the Loop area also destroyed many houses.<sup>56</sup> The new plaza received much publicity in the local *St. Albans Advertiser*. Throughout 1980 and 1981, many front-page articles showed off progress on the project. "Similar to Huntington's Heritage Village and downtown Alexandria, Virginia, the plaza is designed to keep a people-oriented, personal, and relaxing atmosphere while retaining for the town a vigorous service and commercial base."<sup>57</sup> The city received a United States Department of Housing and Urban Development grant of

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<sup>56</sup> Robinson, Interview; Filbin, interview.

<sup>57</sup> "Main Street Merchants Offer Variety of Products, Services," *St. Albans Advertiser*, 4 December 1980.

\$450,000 for the Olde Main Plaza project. Besides closing the street and rerouting traffic, the project included adding a clock tower, fountain, gazebo, and benches on the street and replacing the asphalt with brick. The primary goal of these features was to “lure shoppers downtown” according to the *St. Albans Advertiser*. The city’s financial adviser also claimed this plaza would be a ““Cadillac mall”” for the town and surrounding area.<sup>58</sup> The same article promoted the entire revitalized area saying, “A grocery store is projected in the urban renewal area. The Coal River riverfront park with its walks, shelter and play area completes the complex.”<sup>59</sup> This development did not happen. For many years, on the site of the proposed grocery store, a half constructed building stood. Eventually, the building was completed and a health clinic moved into it (see Appendix 3). The grocery store never materialized and neither did the riverfront park along the Coal. Moreover, the plaza was to restore and revitalize the district and it was to “attract shoppers and tourists from a wide area.”<sup>60</sup> It failed to meet these expectations.

Within a few short years, the Alban Theater along with many other shops closed because people did not frequent the plaza. As the 1980s ended, it seemed Olde Main Plaza’s importance ended also. What began with fanfare at the decade’s beginning was now nearly gone. During the 1990s, last significant services left the plaza. City Hall relocated, and then long-time plaza resident Charter Cable Company closed its payment office.

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<sup>58</sup> Allen Speight and Tommy Galloway, “Main Street Mall Work Planned for Spring,” *St. Albans Advertiser*, 24 January 1980.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*



Thus, when SARG was founded and began its revitalization efforts, the need was real. Since its inception, the group has made strides toward its goal to bring the Olde Main district back to its former glory. In the early stages of revitalization of its historic district, the town has many assets to capitalize on. From the days of the early frontier to the prime years of the chemical valley, St. Albans has been a major community in the Kanawha Valley region. The town itself has retained much of its traditional small town charm. Many citizens of St. Albans are involved in a variety of civic and social activities that bring people together to celebrate the sense of community. When traditional Main Streets began suffering from changing living and working patterns, many lost this significance sense of community. About the same time as Main Street in St. Albans was becoming Olde Main Plaza, a few of these communities in other states began looking to a new approach in revitalization. Eventually, West Virginia became a part of this movement. Since 1988, communities across the state have used the standards of the Main Street Approach to revitalize and preserve historic and traditional business districts.

St. Albans has recently joined the growing number of communities seeking to use this approach for its Main Street. Around the town, there are many reminders of its long history from frontier days and the turnpike, through coal and lumber, to its 1950s glory. There are many grand homes built by early residents, lumber barons and successful merchants. Moreover, there are several other structures still standing that remind residents and visitors of the town's lively past. Revitalizing the commercial district can also bring other cultural capital in a town. St. Albans seems to have the potential for Main Street revitalization to be successful, but will it? Just what will be necessary for the Main Street Approach to work in St. Albans?

## Chapter IV:

### St. Albans Renaissance Group Analysis

#### Introduction

St. Albans has a colorful history and many architectural reminders of its past, but a successful Main Street revitalization requires much more than architecture. The Four-Point Approach also calls for organization, promotion and economic restructuring. In addition, successful programs exhibit the five elements of a model program as discussed in Chapter II. St. Albans has in place the Four-Points and SARG had developed plans to carryout the program goals. Becoming a certified Main Street community means the program must adhere to the Four-Point Approach, utilize the eight guiding principles, and use historic preseveration in the revitalization process.<sup>1</sup> Moreover, the program must create a governing board, hire a full-time director, and create volunteer committees corresponding to the four-points. In 2001, SARG became a certified Main Street community. Currently the organization meets all requirements set forth by the National Main Street Center. SARG created an annual work plan to detail and steer goals for the year. All four committees are actively engaged in several projects. SARG, however, at the writing of this paper, is without a full-time director and is in the process of filling the vacancy.

The group has laid out several plans for the future of Main Street and the city. These long-term goals include marketing the city as a place for retirees. The Economic Restructuring committee is researching the possibility of obtaining a “Designated

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<sup>1</sup>“Policy on the Use of the Name ‘Main Street’,” [website] National Trust for Historic Preservation, Washington, DC: National Trust for Historic Preservation, 2004, [available at <http://www.mainstreet.org/content.aspx?page=2108&section=15> accessed on: 15 April 2005. ], 1

Retirement Community” certification. Another target population is young families because the city has many affordable houses for first-time or moderate income home buyers. Since the town has a long and colorful history with many historic homes and two major rivers, SARG may market the town as a cultural heritage destination.

Among the short-term goals for SARG are creating a business friendly environment on Main Street and inviting a diversity of businesses. The Economic Restructuring committee’s duties include business recruitment and finding niche or destination businesses to occupy Main Street. In order to compete with large box retailers, businesses on Main Street need to offer services and conveniences that these large impersonal stores cannot. Other goals for SARG are to “convert under utilized space to productive property” and to “improve quality of life of all St. Albans residents.”<sup>2</sup>

### **The Five Elements of Successful Programs**

#### ***City Support***

For Olde Main to return to its former significance, the city must be a key participant in the revitalization process. As mentioned in Chapter II, most successful Main Street programs find a vital ally in city government. Support from the city takes many forms. Financial assistance, city planning efforts, or revised zoning laws are just three ways city governments lend support to Main Street organizations. As one of the Main Street guiding principle notes, “No one else will save your Main Street. Local leaders must have the will and desire to mobilize local resources and talent.”<sup>3</sup> One of the best means to achieve this self-help is through the city.

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<sup>2</sup> St. Albans Renaissance Group, “2004 Annual meeting” brochure.

<sup>3</sup> National Main Street Center, “The Main Street Philosophy: Eight Principles of Success,” <http://www.mainstreet.org/content.aspx?page=2358&section=2>, 1.

In St. Albans, the city and SARG have a formal working partnership. The mayor and one council member are part of the organizational board.<sup>4</sup> Thus far, the city is a willing partner in Main Street revitalization. In 2002, city council approved reopening Main Street to one-way traffic. That same year Mayor Richard Milam expressed interest in returning City Hall to Main Street.<sup>5</sup>

More recently, the city has lent its support to a major streetscaping project. The first phase of the project began in August 2004 with a \$250,000 federal enhancement grant and \$60,000 from the city. The project improved sidewalks, added benches, put in new streetlights and erected large metal signs denoting the historic district along the Third Avenue entrance to the city.<sup>6</sup> Also in August 2004, St. Albans city council approved plans to install a light on one of the businesses to deter unwanted activities at night in the Main Street district.<sup>7</sup> Continuing to foster and strengthen the partnership with the city is important to future growth of Olde Main.

For Main Street to develop more completely, these three recommendations should be evaluated:

- Zoning. The city needs to address zoning laws for Main Street. Currently there are several bars located on the street. These bars create a different atmosphere at night on Main Street most of the other businesses close after 5 p.m. and on the weekends. The city has helped by adding lighting and increased police patrols. Fewer bars make a better impression to potential

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<sup>4</sup> St. Albans Renaissance Group, "2004 Annual meeting" brochure.

<sup>5</sup> Rick Steelhammer, "St. Albans Officials Want to Move Back Downtown," *Charleston Gazette*, 17 September 2002.

<sup>6</sup> Jennifer Ginsberg, "A Welcome Addition," *Charleston Gazette*, 22 December 2004.

<sup>7</sup> Jamie Henline, "St. Albans Cracks Down on Plaza Mischief," *Charleston Gazette*, 17 August 2004.

businesses and only the city can create zoning to prohibit these establishments.

- Grant Funding. In many successful Main Street programs, the city offers tax credits and assists with matching funds for rehabilitation grants. This is one of the group's short-term goals.
- The Loop. The biggest obstacle in reconnecting Main Street to the Coal River is the flow of traffic in the district. The city agreed to reopen the Olde Main Plaza to one-way traffic in 2002. To make greater use of the area, an assessment of the traffic situation on the Loop area is needed to determine the best way to overhaul the Loop area.

### ***Private and Public Partnerships***

SARG has a host of local organizations and business people involved with revitalization efforts. They have succeeded in gathering together many members of the community in the process. Many members of the local business community serve on the various committees. Employees from BB&T bank, Chapman Technical Group and Colonial Interiors are just a few who volunteer with SARG. There are several well established businesses on Main Street, such as Coal River Insurance and Fret 'N Fiddle. Since these businesses are staples in the community, their input on Main Street's progress should be highly considered. An important recent partnership developed during the streetscape project along 6th Avenue when the Kanawha Valley Regional Transportation Authority included a \$50,000 upgrade to its St. Albans bus station.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Ginsberg.

A very productive partnership is emerging between SARG and local realtor Bill Currey. Currey has many properties on Main Street under his real estate listing. He has been working to find buyers or leasees for these buildings. In fall 2004, two new businesses moved into vacant buildings on Main Street. The large three-story “Ivanhoe Lodge” building at 51 Main Street was sold, and the new owners leased part of the building to Qk4, an engineering firm. The engineering company will use the second floor while the ground store-front level will be marketed for other retail or office use. The second new tenant in late 2004, KFS-Timbermark, a forest management company, is making improvements to the property at 75 Main Street.<sup>9</sup> In addition to his real estate listings on Main Street, Currey is president of a local non-profit organization, the Coal River Group. The mission of the group is to increase awareness and use of the Coal River. They also sponsor river clean-ups and advocate historic preservation, community development and environmental assessment of the river.<sup>10</sup>

As businesses begin to return to Main Street, SARG should consider creating a vehicle to strengthen ties among businesses, investors, property owners and the community.

- Partnership Groups. Making businesses viable is the most important duty of the Main Street program. Therefore, creating opportunities to assist new and existing businesses would greatly enhance the odds that Main Street businesses will succeed. Activities might include holding workshops about starting and maintaining small businesses and creating networking and

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<sup>9</sup> “St. Albans Main Street Welcomes New Business,” *St. Albans Monthly*, November 2004.

<sup>10</sup> Coal River Group, “What We Do,” [website] St. Albans, WV: Coal River Group, nd. [available at: <http://www.coalrivergroup.com/Goals%20&%20Objectives%20-%20Coal%20River%20Group.htm> accessed on 2 April 2005.]

mentoring opportunities for people interested in starting businesses on Main Street. Established merchants within the city might serve as speakers or mentors for the meetings.

- Coal River Group. This partnership looks promising for further cultural and recreational opportunities. A partnership with the Coal River Group becomes an important vehicle to develop more activities connected to Coal River history and recreation. Since the Coal River Group's mission is to make better use of the river and since SARG wants to enhance the quality of life for St. Albans residents, this is a perfect opportunity to create a partnership that enriches both organizations.
- Bank Loan Pool. Banks are vital in supporting local businesses. A low interest loan pool for Main Street building and business owners to assist with façade and other improvement would enhance the physical appearance of the street. There are four banks and one credit union in the city, and a former president of SARG's Board of Directors works for BB&T bank. One of SARG's goals is to offer low interest loans and façade grants to property owners, a strategy which is a widely used elsewhere.

### ***Focal Point Downtown***

Main Street once needed no special attraction because it was the lifeblood of the city. Today with changes in shopping and living patterns, Main Street must have attractions to become a destination for consumers and visitors. Although there are some stores in Olde Main, the district still has many vacant storefronts but has no major centerpiece. When City Hall relocated to the Municipal Utility Commission building

along U. S. Route 60, the old plaza lost its anchor and nothing similar yet draws people to Main Street. Filling that large void on Main Street would increase essential foot traffic for businesses to attract more people to see the progress of revitalization.

As evident from the successes of other Main Street communities, having something that draws visitors consistently is vital in getting people back to the area. St. Albans has several possibilities.

- City Hall. City Hall would provide Main Street with a major draw for Main Street. Citizens would have more reasons to visit and city employees would provide foot traffic in the area. Moreover, residents would go to City Hall to get permits, pay municipal fees, and attend city council meetings.
- Alban Theater. The theater is a perfect centerpiece to serve as a community center or multi-functional performing center. This would give the area a centerpiece for cultural and heritage related events. According to realtor Bill Currey, the interior of the theater is in great condition. The current owners, a Jehovah's Witness congregation, have restored the theater. As other communities have found, these small theaters make wonderful venues for local performing arts troupes, local musicians and for showing classic movies, art films and documentaries.
- Coal River. Main Street is within blocks of the Coal River, which is an excellent source for recreational and cultural development. The Coal River Group, for example, will host the "Tour de Coal" river float during the 2005 Fourth of July Riverfest. Participants will end the float at St.



Albans, providing an excellent opportunity to bring tourists and shoppers to Main Street. Bringing Main Street and the river together will enhance both areas and create a large base of visitors. This also creates an opportunity for SARG and the city to develop as a destination for tourists and local outdoor enthusiasts.

All three of these focal points could become a part of the revitalized Main Street.

### ***Promotions***

SARG has been getting the word out about the progress on Main Street. In recent months, the group has placed advertisements in the town newspaper featuring available properties for rent or sale. In December 2004, the local business newspaper *State Journal* featured the Olde Main district. For the streetscape project, the group is selling commemorative bricks and has just begun a flag sale, with promotions for both in the town's newspaper. During 2004, SARG sent a one-page flyer through the city water bill to tout the progress made on Main Street. Future plans include an update and redesign of the group's website.

SARG needs further to promote the revitalization on Main Street while providing more information to the community at-large.

- Website. This format offers a great opportunity to reach a larger audience and is a strong and important vehicle to promote and display the successes of SARG. The website also gives Main Street businesses another form of advertising and possible e-commerce opportunities. SARG is in the process of redesigning its website.

- Brochures. Supplementing the website, brochures provide an excellent method to recruit businesses and to promote the Olde Main district outside of the area. Currently, SARG has one brochure that markets membership opportunities. There are no brochures that promote the town and reasons to locate a business in St. Albans or Main Street.
- Newsletters or column. Another way to reach many potential customers and businesses is through newsletters or columns in local newspapers. Having a regular column in the *St. Albans Monthly* or *Charleston Gazette and Daily Mail's* Metro section would provide a constant flow of information about activity and accomplishments on Main Street. In conjunction with a newspaper column, SARG should develop some type of electronic newsletter to be placed on the website. Right now there is not a wide scale media campaign to promote new businesses and activities of SARG. There have been occasional articles in the local St. Albans paper and some advertisements for fundraisers, but not on a consistent basis.

### ***Events and celebrations of community***

Currently SARG and the city are hosts for parades at Christmas and Easter. In October 2004, SARG hosted an art auction as a fundraiser. During the summer, an all class high school reunion brought hundreds of people back to Main Street.

Although events and celebrations are time consuming, the satisfying and beneficial rewards are getting people back to Main Street. While holidays are certainly built-in events, SARG should also consider broadening their events and celebrations.

- Tie to City Events. There are several city events, such as the Festival of Lights and Riverfest, that SARG should partner with. Having Main Street prominently featured during these events will increase exposure of the revitalized district. Also, joining or creating new events with the Coal River Group would provide more opportunities for recreational activities.
- Farmers Market. During the summer and fall many area residents enjoy buying fresh produce and many local vendors set up roadside vegetable stands on U. S. Route 60. St. Albans should take advantage of this broad appeal by creating a produce market area on Main Street. The market could easily expand to include local baked goods, food products and crafts.
- Heritage Events. The town's rich history is a natural foundation for new festivals. People enjoy coming to and participating in such events. In St. Albans there are many avenues to explore: pioneer/frontier reenactments and/or Civil War reenactments; festivals related to Native American history, lumber history, railroad history, and river travel history. All such attractions might connect Main Street to the greater St. Albans community and tie nicely to the river.

### **Other observations**

One of the most vital components of the Main Street Program is Economic Restructuring (ER). This point is the key in recruiting and maintaining businesses on Main Street. Nothing else will help Main Street. Spending several months as a participant on the ER committee brought great insight into the Main Street Program and the Main Street Approach. This first hand experience brought together all other research

to give a clear understanding of the successes and obstacles in the revitalizing process. The ER committee, at least for SARG, is the guiding and planning unit. The committee's work sets the goals for most of the other committees' duties. Throughout the monthly meetings, the ER committee discussed many issues. Some were recurring, large-scale issues that must be addressed in the future. Several of these are elaborated upon in the recommendations above. However, there were several other issues not directly related to the five elements that are equally important. One is the smaller matter of signage along local roads directing travelers to the historic district. And the larger question is: Can St. Albans develop as a cultural heritage destination?

### *Signage*

During several economic committee meetings, the idea/issue of getting travelers back downtown was a major discussion. It was mentioned that St. Albans needs signage along U. S. Route 60 directing people to the Main Street area. Signage would greatly enhance knowledge of the area for travelers. Most non-residents only see the city from U. S. Route 60. This creates their impression of the town, and in many cases they do not realize the vast cultural assets only a few blocks away from the highway. Placing directional markers informing travelers about the historic homes and the Main Street district would work to change that perception. Possible places for signs include Third Street and Route 60 intersection, B Street and Route 60 intersection and Kanawha Terrace and Route 60 intersection. This signage should also be extended to the St. Albans exit of Interstate 64.

### *Cultural Heritage*

One long-term goal for SARG is to develop and market St. Albans as a cultural heritage destination. According to Preservation Alliance of West Virginia, a statewide organization for historic preservation, cultural heritage travel is growing twice as fast as regular travel. Their study, conducted jointly with Main Street West Virginia, looked at the potential for heritage tourism in the state. The study found that “81% of all domestic travelers included a cultural activity in their leisure travel.”<sup>11</sup> In addition, the study contends that “54% of these travelers want to get off the beaten path which creates rural economic development opportunities and 58% want different foods which provide income for small family restaurants.”<sup>12</sup>

Cultural heritage tourism in West Virginia highlights historic communities and sites, rural and small towns, museums, performance arts and nature-based activities. Preservation Alliance of West Virginia believes that “this form of tourism honors West Virginia’s past by capturing and telling the stories of our state’s heritage to visitors, neighbors, and, most importantly, for children.”<sup>13</sup> Cultural heritage tourism appears to be an opportunity the State’s Development Office and the Main Street Program are willing to pursue.

The opportunity for St. Albans to utilize cultural heritage tourism as a vehicle to revitalize Main Street is realistic since it capitalizes on several aspects already planned by SARG. Furthermore, according to Preservation Alliance of West Virginia, eco-tourism is

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<sup>11</sup> Preservation Alliance of West Virginia, “Establishing a State-Funded West Virginia Heritage Tourism Program,”[website] Charleston, WV: Preservation Alliance of West Virginia, 2005, [available at: <http://www.pawv.org/wvchp/chpcsstate.htm> accessed 5 April 2005.], 3.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*

also a feature of cultural heritage tourism. Eco-tourism connects well with St. Albans' location along two waterways and SARG's partnership with the Coal River Group. Moreover, linkage with other cultural events and performing arts provides equally viable possibilities for SARG to incorporate into any cultural heritage tourism plan.

The major drawback for St. Albans as a cultural heritage tourism destination is the shortage of lodging within the city. While St. Albans possesses many restaurants there are no hotels or motels in the town. There are, however, some motels located a few miles outside the city along U. S. Route 60. Thus, a future business opportunity related to cultural heritage tourism in St. Albans would be developing a network of bed and breakfasts within city. The city of St. Albans is fortunate to have many historic homes and buildings within its borders. The St. Albans Historical Society conducts a walking tour of historic homes and buildings. Currently, this is a bi-yearly event, but if heritage tourism visitors began coming to St. Albans, it would be a perfect event to expand.

The town's long and interesting history gives it cultural significance and character. Its location along two major rivers gives easy access to many recreational activities. All of these advantages are within a few blocks of Main Street. As the city moves toward revitalization, all of these ingredients should become factors in developing short and long-term plans for Main Street. Moreover, capitalizing on existing and unique assets is another one of the eight guiding principles of the national Main Street program. If SARG and St. Albans continue to follow the Main Street model, its principles, and the proven elements used elsewhere, success should come. The town has the fundamental qualities needed to succeed in the Main Street program. Since real success takes many years, only time will prove whether the efforts this time produce lasting results.

## Chapter V:

### **Conclusion**

America's large cities and small towns experienced great changes in the last century that led to a growing number of urban problems. To assist with these problems, the federal government designed programs that came to be known as urban renewal. The early projects attempted to clear substandard housing while providing new decent housing; however, they often evolved into large-scale city clearing. Many municipalities chose "slum" clearance as a method to redevelop older sections of their cities. As federal money flowed into city coffers for these projects, residents often faced displacement. Soon even small towns designed urban renewal projects. These towns cleared away old buildings to make way for new shopping centers, parking lots and public buildings. In the decades after World War II, cities, regardless of size, began experiencing steady loss of population to suburban areas. The National Interstate Highway program accelerated this population loss while reshaping the urban landscape. Amid all of these changes, America's Main Streets lost importance. Major retailers pushed many mom and pop stores out of business. Main Street had little value to big box retailers who preferred massive, uniform buildings. Many city officials thought urban renewal held the cure for the decline in traditional business districts. These attempts at revitalization of downtowns often created pedestrian malls that prohibited automobile traffic or razed entire city blocks for future Superblock developments that usually failed to materialize.

Twenty-five years ago some community leaders called for a new solution to assist ailing Main Streets. Led by the National Trust for Historic Preservation, their efforts led to the formation of the National Main Street Program. The Main Street Program Center

and its Main Street Approach work to revitalize traditional downtowns through a well planned process. With the success of so many Main Street Programs nationally, it is clear the method works. Since the Main Street Program came out of the National Trust, it recognizes the importance of older buildings and their value to the community. Unlike the demolish and redevelopment approach of too many urban renewal projects, the Main Street Program takes a proactive attitude toward revitalization.

Their Four-Point Approach deals with business recruitment and retention as an ongoing process. The Program recognizes that revitalization is a slow process that must include the entire community; therefore, community volunteers and partnerships between businesses, government and the public are highly valued and a major requisite for local programs. Moreover, the commitment of city government is vital. The National Main Street Center's Director, Kennedy Smith, states: “. . . Main Street revitalization doesn't really take place on Main Street—it takes place in a community's planning and land-use policies. Get land-use policies right, and new development will take place on Main Street, not on the edge of the community.”<sup>1</sup> In addition to land-use and zoning laws, Smith notes other important steps that Main Street programs should include: financial incentives for investing on Main Street; a supportive business environment; downtown housing; adding more than just retail to the district, and a greater emphasis on history.<sup>2</sup>

Even in the era of big box retailers, Main Street can succeed. The 2004 Main Street Trends Survey shows the continuing economic growth for Main Street communities. For the fifth straight year most communities reported solid numbers. According to the survey 73 percent of communities are seeing an increase in

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<sup>1</sup> Kennedy Smith, “The Road Ahead,” *Main Street News*, June/July no. 208(2004):8.

<sup>2</sup> Kennedy Smith, “The State of Main Street,” *Main Street News*, June/July no. 208(2004): 5-7.



rehabilitation projects over 2003. Respondents report ground-floor occupancy is up, and many are seeing an increase in retail shops and restaurants. Professional offices are another growing business on Main Street; one-third of communities report an increase. More communities are including festivals as a revitalization tool; three-quarters of Main Street programs report an increased attendance for their events. Correspondingly, more communities are rehabilitating historic theaters. Emporia, Kansas, turned its old downtown theater into a multi-use facility. Shelby, North Carolina, obtained a Department of Housing and Urban Development grant to restore its old theatre. In Bradford, Pennsylvania, the old theater there received a make over and now shows first-run movies.<sup>3</sup>

For many towns, participating in the Main Street Program brought their downtowns back from the brink of extinction. Working to revitalize Olde Main in St. Albans, SARG also aspires to succeed where other revitalization plans have failed. The SARG program has a solid start on the process and seeks to build upon that foundation, but there are obstacles it must work around. Interstate 64 bypassed the town, and the nearest exit does not provide travelers with quick access to the city. U. S. Route 60 does not take traffic through the Olde Main historic district. No focal point activity readily brings people to Olde Main. Despite these problems and those of past urban renewal project creating Olde Main Plaza, there are many successes for SARG. One-way traffic can now access Main Street again. In 2004, two Main Street buildings gained new tenants. A new streetscape project is beautifying the district. Signs of a new life are slowly appearing.

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<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 2-3.

Nevertheless, SARG has much to do on Main Street. There are still too many vacant buildings and too many bars located on the street. Having these establishments changes the dynamic of the street after traditional businesses hours. The city is making some steps toward improving the area at night with new lighting. To make the street a viable area, however, the city needs to do more to address the issue.

Building on their accomplishments, SARG continues to look for destination and niche businesses to fill the empty storefronts. In conjunction with recruiting businesses, the program must get a focal point on the street. Currently, there is no special attraction to draw people back to Main Street in the way City Hall and the Alban Theater once anchored the street. SARG needs to designate something as Main Street's new focal point and begin work toward obtaining the centerpiece for the district. Developing housing as suggested by National Main Street Director Smith has not been a high priority for SARG. There are apartments available in a few of the larger buildings, but SARG has not investigated the question of building codes necessary to expand housing.

SARG is proud to share its accomplishments with the community. Communicating effectively what is happening in Main Street will help gain community support for these undertakings. By launching an improved website, SARG will have a more outlets to disseminate their information.

More events on Main Street are crucial because they are effective in promoting Main Street. Moreover, they are popular with many people, and they showcase the businesses that have returned or remained on Main Street. SARG has a strong base of community members volunteering on committees, and the town's emphasis on community bodes well for more partnerships among businesses and community in the

future. As SARG continues to build upon their recent accomplishments, these should lead to more success in the future.

Main Streets promote community. They are places to shop, live, work and socialize. Shopping complexes, indoor malls and warehouse style stores with their architectural uniformity cannot offer the uniqueness found on Main Street. It is important that communities reevaluate the role of Main Street because not only does it provide economic benefits to the town, it also provides connections to the town's history, culture and architecture. St. Albans is fortunate to have many historic structures in the town. These homes and buildings provide the community with a strong link to its past. SARG is well aware of the valuable assets St. Albans has to build on, and it has chosen the successful Main Street Approach as the best means to bring new vitality to the Olde Main historic district. It is now up to the St. Albans Renaissance Group to provide the energy and leadership to make St. Albans a vital place for daily commerce and a place that visitors will find worth visiting.

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Researching recent history proved to be an interesting challenge. For example, I never was able to pinpoint the actual year of completion for the new Route 60. I found a range from the 1920s to the 1940s, but never a conclusive date. On earlier history, resources were much better. However, occasionally the exact date problem would pop up again. Trying to find the date Phillip R. Thompson built his home Muckamore was a challenge I could not resolve. There were also two spellings of the house name Muckamore and Muckmore.

The St. Albans Historical Society published several books on the town's history that were very useful. The most valuable resource was the *St. Albans: Historic and Architectural Survey* conducted by Paul Marshall and Associates in 1983. This report surveyed the historic homes in the town and provided background on the area's frontier settlement. For the National Main Street Program, the organization's website provided many great resources including articles from their publication *Main Street News*. Also, being a part of the Economic Redevelopment Committee has provided me with much information not specifically cited but essential to my understanding. This is especially true for the issues discussed in Chapter IV.

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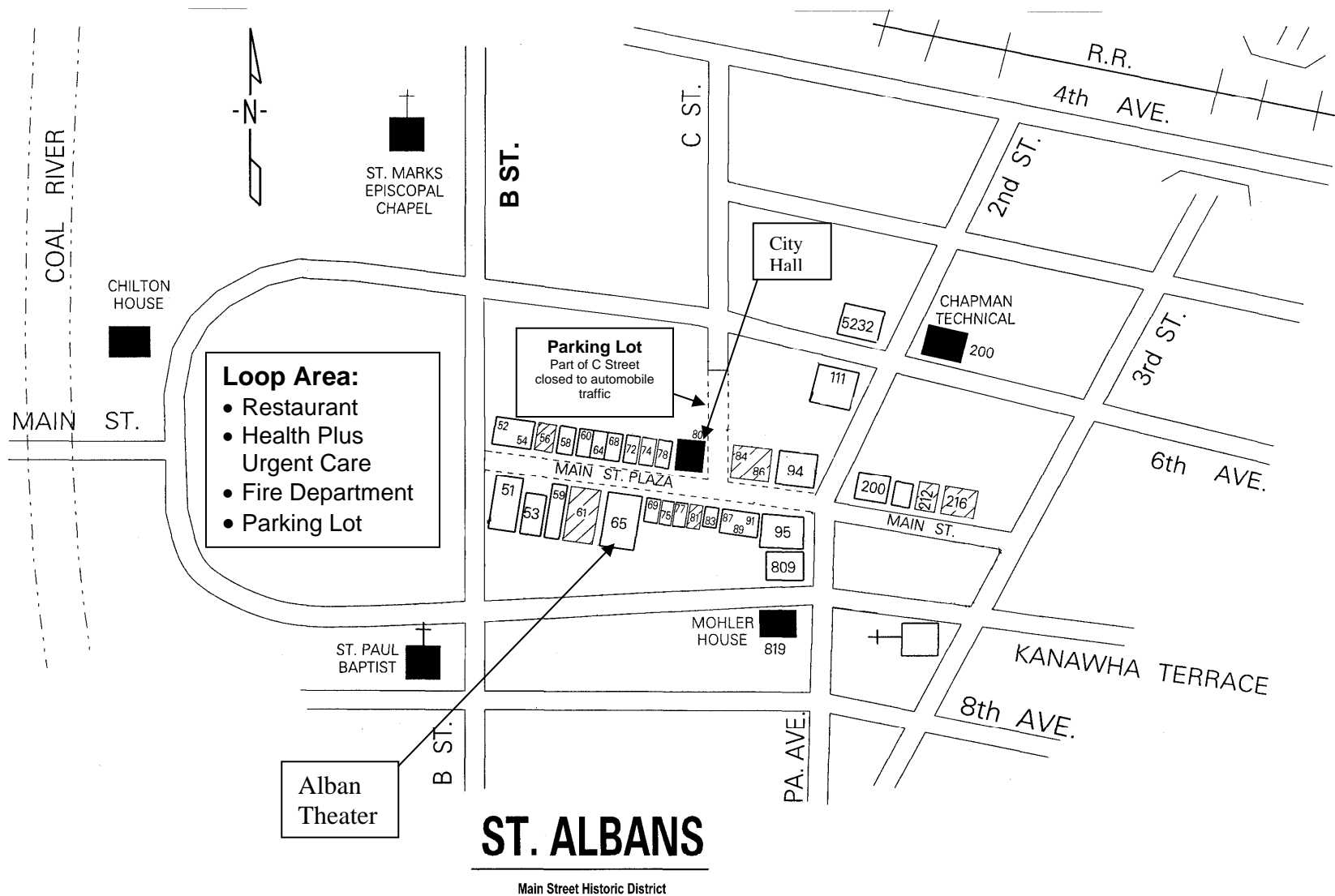
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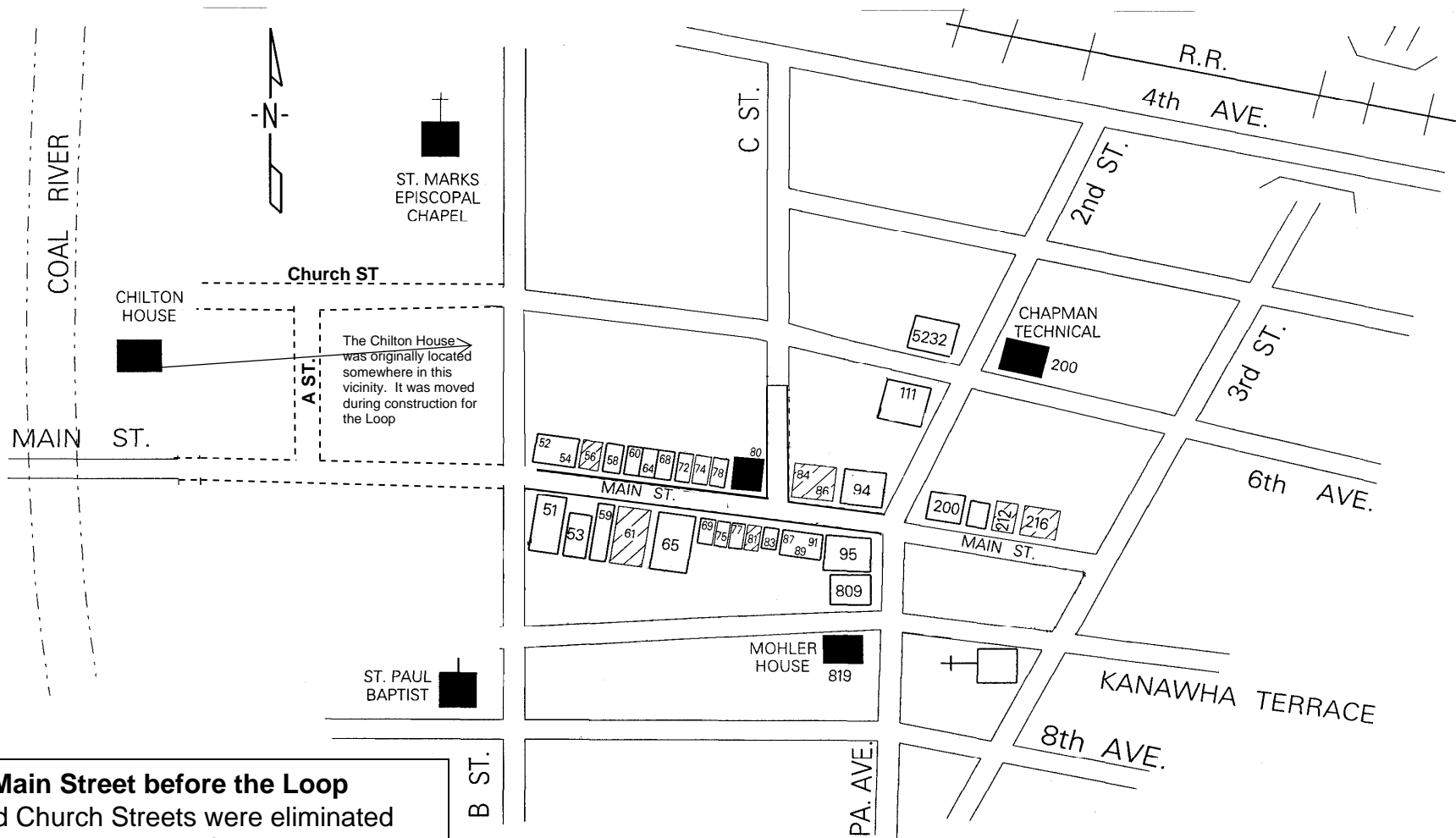
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Map modified from National Register of Historic Places nomination form for Olde Main District.



### Main Street before the Loop

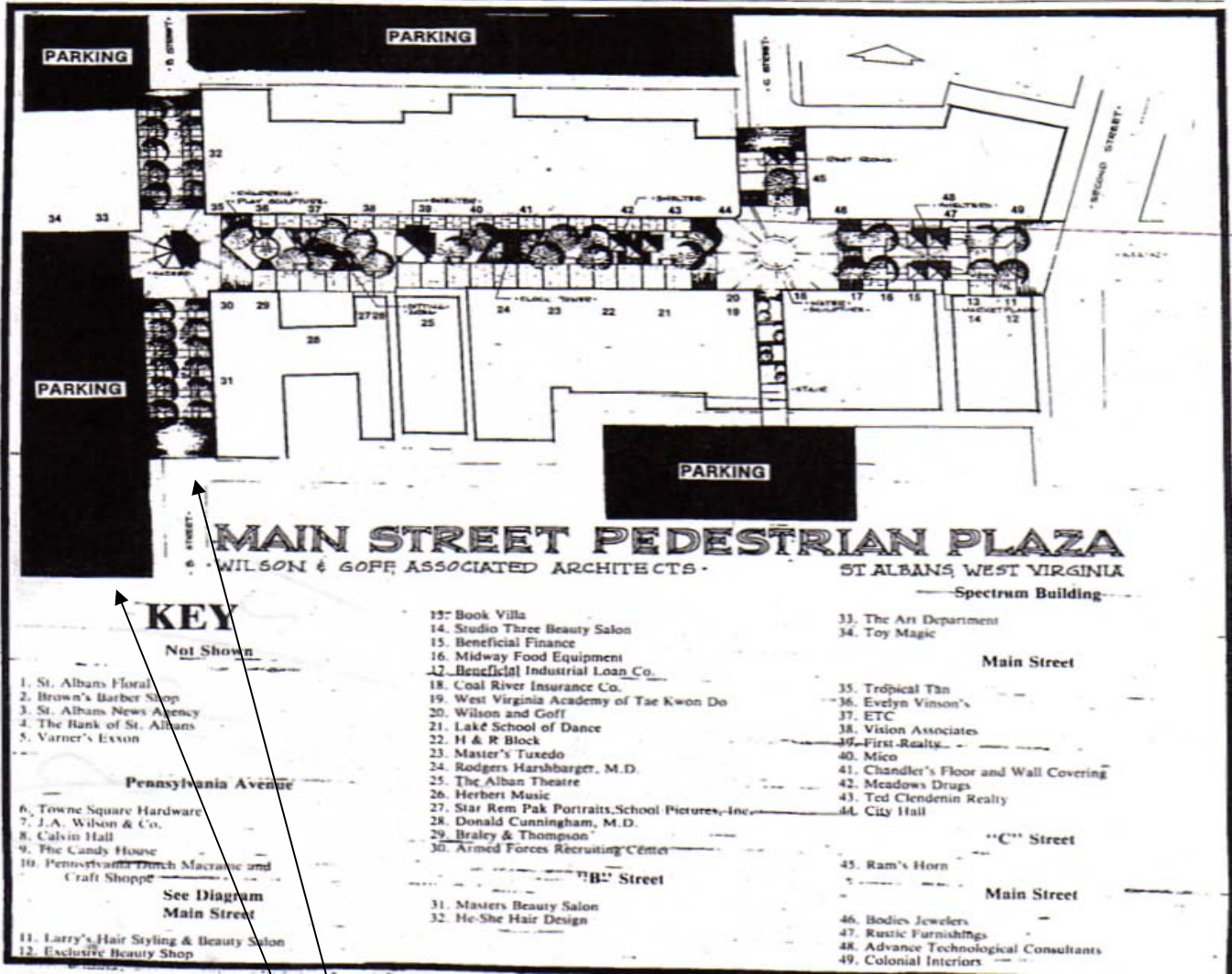
- A and Church Streets were eliminated during the construct of the Loop
- Main Street from the Coal River Bridge to B Street also was eliminated.
- Chilton House was moved to present location near the river
- C Street was open to through traffic. Part of the street was closed to serve as a walkway between the plaza's parking lot and Olde Main Plaza

## ST. ALBANS

Main Street Historic District

Map modified from National Register of Historic Places nomination form for Olde Main District.

From the *St. Albans Advertiser* December 4, 1980



- B Street closed to automobile traffic

Area where proposed grocery store was to be built.